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army families federation

ARMY FAMILIES ROADSHOW Kinloss 2017

Questions
and
Answers



Kinloss Roadshow - 23 March 2017

Foreword

AFF's Scotland roadshow in March 2017 was a great opportunity for the AFF team to meet with families and local command and learn more about the issues families in this area are facing. We were delighted with the turnout, which showed the depth of feeling amongst families wanting to have their issues heard and pose their questions to decision makers.

The main issue raised was education and AFF was made aware of families' concerns surrounding access to school places, curriculum differences and the impact of the later starting age for schoolchildren in Scotland. AFF will now investigate these issues further, armed with families' feedback.

A number of other issues were raised during, and in anticipation of, our expert panel at the roadshow. These included the effects of Brexit, the possible future independence of Scotland, F&C concerns and housing queries.

This booklet provides an overview of the questions families posed and the answers provided by our expert panel including representatives from Army command and AFF. If you have further questions or would like to talk to us about any aspect of Army family life, please email us@aff.org.uk or call **01264 382324**. Our website www.aff.org.uk also features a wealth of up-to-date information and guidance.

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I've met a lot of people today who can help us make sure we're getting the best education we can for our daughter.

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Questions

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submitted on the day

Q. What is being done to compensate serving personnel in Scotland who from 6 April will be paying the Scottish rate of Income Tax?

A. Deputy Commander Col. Charlie Wallace answered:

As at the 22 March, the issue has been recognised but there is currently no answer. 20% of Service personnel across all three Armed Services in Scotland will be affected. He advised that pressure was being applied to reach a fair solution. It is unclear whether this would, if anything, be an exemption by the Scottish Government or a reimbursement/allowance from the MOD. AFF has also raised the issue at Ministerial level and is awaiting a reply.

AFF is still receiving a large number of enquiries regarding this issue, so it is high on our agenda.

Q. The local Stagecoach bus service between Kinloss and Elgin is due to be discontinued in April. This will disadvantage young people going to school and college and everyone in

the community who uses the bus to access doctors/dentists/shops etc.

A. 39 Engr Regt UWO Eric Baker and Moray Council Armed Forces Champion Counsellor Tuke answered:

The Kinloss/Elgin service is one of a number of Stagecoach services being cut due to a fall in demand and a lack of profitability. They have been told that once the service has been cut, the Dial-a-Bus service will be available and can be booked with 24 hours' notice.

Once the bus service goes, this could impact the CAAS banding of the housing in Kinloss and the possibility of the station receiving isolated status, which could benefit the Service community in other ways. The welfare team agreed to look at an estate-wide CAAS challenge based on location when the bus route officially goes - to be done in parallel with applying for isolated status.

Since the roadshow, AFF has been in touch with the local authority and received this response from Cllr Tuke, which has been passed on to 39Engr welfare:

“Stagecoach have said there will be a

trial run of three months whereby a bus will run from Forres via Findhorn to Kinloss (including South Side) and back. Although not an ideal solution, especially with quarters being split between Kinloss and Elgin, at least it maintains the link with one major town. Families are encouraged to use this service; otherwise it is likely to be withdrawn following the trial period.”

Q. If there is a second Scottish Independence Referendum, what will happen to Foreign & Commonwealth soldiers (and soldiers in general) in Scottish based units?

A. Col. Charlie Wallace responded:

It’s impossible to know what would happen to any of the British Army based in Scotland unfortunately, and this would all be part of the post-independence negotiations, should that ever happen.

Q. Is there any update on FAM?

A. Chief Exec, Sara Baade and Col. Charlie Wallace responded:

There is no decision yet and the details are far from being worked out. What is certain is that the current accommodation situation is unattainable going forward as costs are escalating every year and the budget is not available for this.

FAM also wants to address who is eligible for housing support to ensure a wider group of families benefit from the support, for example, unmarried couples and elderly parents. This means some will see themselves being included where before they were not able to take advantage of any of the housing options. However, since no additional budget is allocated for this wider engagement, some families may see a reduction in their support.

The AFF FAM survey conducted in the autumn of 2016 had over 8,300 responses and clearly showed the importance of SFA and maintaining SFA as a true option at all times. Army families see patch life as a corner stone of Army life and one that must be maintained in a future accommodation landscape.

It also seems that it has been acknowledged that some areas, like Kinloss, will not have the volume of properties available on the private rental market to accommodate the number of families and so SFA will remain.

Q. The only way I cope when my husband is on tour or away on exercise is because of my neighbours who are in the same boat, and the welfare staff who are there if needed. I can’t imagine what it would be like if we had to rent our own place somewhere we don’t know. How is the welfare support going to work?

A. Sara Baade responded:

It is difficult to answer that at this stage as we do not yet know what FAM will look like; but one thing is for sure, if we have more families living in their own houses (and less SFA is available), the welfare model will need to be adjusted to take this into consideration. We know, by looking at the Navy, who have 70% living in their own homes, that living in your own home can cause many to feel isolated and the welfare support is therefore essential. We know the MOD have this on their agenda to consider already and we will continue to push this as a major area for consideration under FAM.

Q. Why have some families had their CAAS banding appeals upheld and some been rejected when they are in identical houses in the same location?

A. AFF Housing Specialist, Cat Calder responded:

AFF is aware that there are inaccuracies in the JSP and that challenges are not being upheld because the responses are not being considered against the JSP. We have raised this with DIO and MOD and will continue to push for a correction. Cat asked for any families affected by this to put together details so that AFF can look at it on an estate-wide basis.

Q. The differences between the Scottish education system and the education systems in the rest of the UK, but particularly in England, mean that our children are finding themselves starting school later in Scotland. Depending on their birthday (if it falls between the 1 March and August), they may then be behind when we move them back into the English system. The local authorities and schools are making it very difficult for us to put them in the year we feel they should be in for their long term educational wellbeing, considering our unique situation. What can AFF do to help us resolve this situation?

A. This was a long discussion, with many families passionately sharing their experiences. CEAS Parent Support Officer, Donna McCartney (based in Leuchars), Col. Charlie Wallace, AFF Chief Exec Sara Baade and Moray Council Forces Champion Councillor Tuke responded:

Donna McCartney asked that anyone with an issue contact her in the first instance as only by collating the evidence of families having problems will it be accepted that there is a widespread problem. She said that only two families had approached her about this issue in the past year, which is clearly not representative of the scale of the issue.

Several families shared their personal experiences and it was established that, whilst some work has been done to allow families to appeal, either

for early entry into the first year of school or to be moved up a year if their birthday fell after the 1 March and before the end of August, more work is still needed. They say it is still a very difficult and stressful process; leaving parents feeling not listened to and worried about the impact on their children's long-term educational progress.

AFF has agreed to work collaboratively with other stakeholders in Scotland to try to move towards a more acceptable solution for families. This may include looking at the rules under which families can currently retain SFA to make them more flexible. This would mean families could avoid moving in and out of Scotland several times within a relatively short period, allowing some continuity of curriculum in either Scotland or England (or other devolved nations) during critical educational phases/ high school. Since the roadshow, Sara Baade has had an initial conversation with the Scottish Government asking for further, more lengthy meetings regarding this issue, once we have all our evidence in place. Sara has also raised this as a major issue with the MOD under the Covenant Act and this will subsequently be added to the CRG issues list.

AFF encourages families to come forward and contact our Education Specialist with their concerns so that she can produce robust evidence and draft an influencing paper on schooling in Scotland. Please contact ec@aff.org.uk if you would like to share your story.

The summer edition of A&Y will cover many of the education issues faced by families living in devolved regions.

Q. The cost of an Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) visa for an F&C spouse has increased over the past few years from hundreds of pounds to now nearly £2,000. Is there anything the Army or Government can do to help us with the cost or loan us the money?

A. AFF Foreign & Commonwealth Specialist Katherine Houlston responded:

Unfortunately, the Government have said there are no plans to reduce the costs for soldiers and they believe there are already some reductions built into the system that make it less expensive for Armed Forces personnel to obtain the visa. She added that, if you are posted accompanied overseas at the time of application, the MOD cover the cost.

Q. There are rumours that 39Engr may be moving in the future and this is really unsettling. Is this true?

A. Col Wallace responded by saying that 39Engr will not be moving.

Questions

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submitted prior to the event

Q. Later on this year, the number of free childcare/nursery hours available in England will increase from 15 to 30 hours per week. The increase is not being offered in Scotland until 2020. We will be disadvantaged from a childcare perspective. Is there anything the MOD can do to compensate for this difference?

A. Childcare hours are decided by each devolved area, so compensating for an England to Scotland move is unlikely. The 30 hours are only accessible for families who meet the criteria. This affects families with children aged three or four years, between September 2017 and 2020.

Q. The pensions seem to keep changing. We are worried that we will make plans to buy a house when my husband leaves based on what he thinks he is due to get, and then the amount will keep changing leaving us short and in debt. Once he has left the Army, will the amount he is due be fixed?

A. The three main Armed Forces

Pension Schemes (AFPS) are AFPS 75, 05 and 15. Less those who were aged 45 or over on 1 Apr 12, everyone else moved over to AFPS 15 on 1 Apr 15. Pension benefits that were earned in previous schemes (AFPS 75 or 05) are protected. The online guidance booklet 'AFPS 15 Your Pension Scheme Explained' (available at Gov.uk) provides a useful overview of the scheme and related benefits. For a forecast of pension benefits, individuals are encouraged to utilise the Armed Forces Pension Calculator available on the internet, which can also be used on mobile and tablet devices. In addition, all personnel remain entitled to one annual free pension forecast from DBS (pension administrators) on Form 12.

There are currently no plans to introduce a new pension scheme for those currently serving and, as many aspects of AFPS15 are protected from change until 2040 (25-year protection from 2015), it would be extremely difficult to change the current pension scheme. In order to deliver a modern and affordable Armed Forces, the MOD are developing a 'New Joiner Offer' (NJO), looking at all aspects of the offer, including pay, pensions and resettlement. The aim is for the New Joiner Offer to be only applicable to

recruits joining the Armed Forces from 2019. Further information on NJO can be found on the Defence Intranet.

Your Pension Scheme Explained - www.gov.uk/government/publications/afps-2015-what-you-need-to-know/armed-forces-pension-scheme-2015-guidance

Pension Calculator - www.mod-abc.co.uk/

Pension Form 12 - www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/574592/AFPS_Form_12.doc

Q. Now that we are going to be paying Scottish Income Tax, it seems even more unfair that our children are not able to pay Scottish student fees at universities up here. Is there anything being done to try to get a change of policy in this area?

A. Our Education Specialist has asked DCYP on behalf of a family that contacted her recently and it has been raised with the Scottish Government. They have assured AFF that the issue of SAAS funding is being looked at now. AFF has sent forward a case study for them to assess.

Sara Baade has also raised this and has had positive feedback. We await more information.

Q. My child struggles with reading and I'm sure it's due to multiple

moves. In England, he got extra help and I think the Service Pupil Premium paid for it. Since we've moved to Scotland, he hasn't been able to get any extra help. The teachers don't think he needs it, as there are other children in the class worse at reading or with issues that are getting support. It is so frustrating as he was getting to where he should be and with all the upheaval again, I can see him falling back.

A. The school should be fully supporting the child. If the parents feel this is not the case, then AFF recommends meeting with the Head. It is also possible to support reading at home and the school may be able to suggest some suitable books?

Q. We enquired about retaining our quarter whilst my husband goes to do a two-year job in England, because he's coming back afterwards. Our son is 12 so we were told that he is not in an exam phase and so we can't retain. We feel that moving him out of the Scottish system to the English system and then back again to take his exams would be a terrible idea and think that, considering the differences in the systems, we should be allowed to stay. Is there any way we can appeal?

A. AFF's Education Specialist is investigating this and will put together AFF recommendations for a way forward for MOD/DIO. It is unlikely to be resolved at a devolved government

level and the retention criteria for SFA may need to be reviewed. However, policy change is currently on hold until a FAM decision is made later this year. In the meantime, the only way to retain SFA is with support from CEAS. JSP464 states:

g. Educational. MOD recognises that there are specific circumstances regarding the education of Service children under which retention of SFA/SSFA is admissible as detailed below. Families should seek advice from HQ CEAS (Children's Education Advisory Service) Trenchard Lines, Upavon (tel: 01980 618244) who are best placed to consider the circumstances of the case. In cases which fall outside the regulations, where there is clear evidence that a Service child with identified SEN would suffer significant educational/ social/emotional disadvantage, CEAS may, on an exceptional basis, issue an Impact Statement recommending retention of SFA/SSFA on educational grounds. The educational grounds for retention of SFA/SSFA are as follows: (1) Cases where children are reaching critical examination periods where retention of SFA/SSFA is admissible for up to 4 months (one academic term) leading up to the final public examination. In cases where it is not possible for the child to transfer schools whilst within 3 years of public examinations e.g. because of school availability in the new location, regional syllabus differences or particular Continuous Assessment Work requirements, retention of SFA/SSFA will be possible up to the public examination, which will include only

GCSE, A/S level, A Level and/or other nationally recognised, full time, higher and further education courses up to and including 1st Degree level (where the child lives permanently in the SFA/SSFA and meets the definition of dependant offspring at Volume 1 Part 2 Chapter 1, Annex C) and the recognised equivalent courses in Scotland. This is subject to successful re-application after 12 months.

You can apply for retention up to three years in advance, however, this child is a year too young.

If the family moves on a two-year posting to England, they could have the choice to retain there until the GCSEs are finished (depending on posting dates), but this would not help with Scottish exams and will disadvantage the child by studying for a different curriculum. AFF believes that if this family can show they will be moving back, then retention should be an option.

Q. We are English but have loved our time in Scotland and were thinking of buying a house here to settle. Now they are talking about independence again though, there is no way we will commit to buying up here until all that's settled again one way or another. Would the British Army move out of Scotland if it did become Independent.

A. See earlier question. In short, impossible to answer at this stage.

Q. Many people are concerned over the future of housing. Is the process far along enough to know whether we will get the opportunity to buy the house (SFA) we currently live in as we are looking to buy in the area but would love to keep the current house.

A. Not really - a decision on FAM is hoped for by the end of the year.

In Scotland, the MOD still own many of the houses, so it is possible they could sell them off; however, it is unlikely that families would be able to purchase them whilst living in situ. In the past, only empty properties have been sold off. It is too early to look at details and if families are thinking of buying in the area in the near future they should look at other options - JSHAO and Military Matters (Housing Options Scotland) are good places to approach for advice.

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I didn't realise there was so much help out there for families. Living up here you can feel quite isolated sometimes.

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