

Speech to Branch Presidents of Gloucestershire County

I come to you today not just to relate to you what The Legion has done over the past year, but to share with you some of the dilemmas which occupy my mind when I look into my crystal ball concerning the future of The Legion and I do this from the perspective of being a National Officer. I will also try to share with you some concerns I have for the future and how I feel that you Ladies and Gentlemen can help me to remove these concerns and allow me to sleep easy at night.

So what have we been doing? Well, firstly let me talk about the Legion's staff and perhaps at the same time dispel a few myths. Currently, we employ 1,135 full time staff. Actually there are more bodies than 1,135, but the Legion employs quite a few part-time staff in our Care Homes and our Break Centres and indeed a number of our case officers are employed on a part-time basis and the secretarial support for one county is done on a job share basis. So, I want you to bear that figure in mind and then come with me on a round of the areas in which these people work. Let's start with Operations (or welfare to give it a name some of us are more comfortable with).

We have this year awarded 7,414 Immediate Needs and Crisis grants. In the last quarter alone the value of our grants totalled £1.9M, of which 34% was attributable to the purchase of household goods. A further 1,670 individuals are being supported by projects funded through our external grants programme. That's the programme that outside organisations bid for money to use for our beneficiaries to be looked after and cared for. We also have a number of outsourced services such as the Bravo 22 Company project, which helps budding thespian beneficiaries to rid themselves of their gremlins by collaborating with each other and putting on plays which they write and act themselves. During the first part of this year the company successfully played before four full houses at the Waterside Theatre in Aylesbury and they have moved on now to Plymouth preparing for performances in December of this year. Another outsourced service is our very fine Battle Back Centre and the feedback from the Battle Backers continues to be glowing from the experiences they have at this wonderful centre. And I must not move on before talking about the pilot project with

Marks and Spencer to provide retail and logistic type placements for ex-servicemen in the Leeds, Colchester and Castle Donnington areas. The initial pilot is for 50 placements but there is hope to continue in 2016 and beyond.

Our commissioned services include Independent Living Advice, Outreach, Benefit and Money Advice, our Moneyforce website where the top three pages visited have been Child Benefit, Tax Credits, War Pensions and Medical Discharge. This shows that the people are accessing information and that it is benefitting our beneficiaries. Then we have our Knowledgebase which is being used more and more as persons of all age groups are using it to glean information which they can trust. Other commissioned services include Poppy Calls and Admiral Nurses.

Our care and Advocacy services include War Pensions, our Care Homes, and did anybody watch that excellent documentary on dementia at our Poppy Home in the West Midlands on channel Four recently? If you missed it, you may still be able to call it up on Channel Four on demand.

Remembrance is being well looked after by The National Memorial Arboretum. Visitor numbers are running 30% ahead of last year's year to date figures, the dedication of 145 WW1 overseas VC award paviers took place on March 5th, the battle of Neuve Chapelle was commemorated on 10th March in the presence of The Indian High Commissioner and representatives from the Sikh, Muslim and Hindu communities.

Membership LOMAS training is taking place before October of this year and county and district budgets will be solely based on LOMAS entries for the first time this year in the budget round.

Representation or Campaigns as I prefer to call it. Our Insult to Injury campaign has gathered pace. 3,094 letters have been sent to MPs along with 1,230 to members of The Welsh Assembly, 1,511 to members of The Scottish Parliament and Northern Irish MPs have also been contacted. We published a 2015 General Election Manifesto and the government has already moved to support a number of our demands. The government has awarded a grant of £3M for the provision of mobility equipment for those injured in service and £10M to a hearing aid fund following

representations made by us to the Treasury and MOD officials for state of the art hearing aids.

That was a quick round robin of some of the things we have been up to this year, but of course all these services need support and our Poppy Appeal income at the end of March stood at £42M which represents an 18% increase in comparison to last year. We continue to involve ourselves in Mass events and the Legion is hoping to raise £450K from this year's Pedal to Paris. Our Direct Marketing continues with our door-to-door activity finding 11,000 new supporters setting themselves up on an average direct debit of £9.20 per month. We are still enumerating our VE Day event which was set to glean some 9,200 new supporters. Regarding Prize-led fundraising our Lottery income is £400K up, whilst our Raffle income has reduced slightly and our scratchcards sold though PayPoint convenience stores and other outlets are set to expand. Poppy shop is up 58% compared to this time in 2014 with an average order of £25.90 per customer. Always a difficult one is our Legacy income, but this year it is up 58% up on budget! Corporate Partnerships with the Coventry Building Society, M&S jewellery and Lights Our candles, Sainsbury chocolate, Hovis Bread and with Iceland having us as Charity of the Year. Our Major Donors and Trusts team are currently helping the NMA reach its £5.7M target for the new exciting rebuild which is due to start very soon.

I know that you will be aware that our new Marketing and Communications directorate have hit the ground running. The new branding exercise called LIVE ON is gradually and carefully being rolled out to considerable effect and I know is making considerable impact on the media and gives us a new clean image and the strapline means a lot to me as I'm sure it does to you as well.

So where does this leave us? You will remember I mentioned our 1,135 staff? Seven tenths of our staff work delivering our welfare services and actually half of our people work in our care and break homes. One in five of our staff work from Haig House. A number of our staff work in fundraising and we have calculated that each one of our fundraising staff last year were responsible for generating £651,000. Oh! And

please be assured that we pay them nothing like that amount. That is a staggering amount don't you think? Last year our income was £133.5M. Of every pound raised, 61 pence was in the form of donations. Of this, roughly half - or 30 pence in the pound - came from the Poppy Appeal. Members and volunteers are hugely important in getting our work done. Our staff could not get the work done without our members and volunteers but I venture to say that our members and volunteers could not get the work done our without our staff - it's a partnership and as the DG said in his conference speech at Southport it's a partnership and together we are stronger than the sum of our parts.

Now, while talking about conference, I have a bone to pick with you good people of Gloucestershire. In my Conference speech I said the following:

"Next year I would like to be delivering my speech to a new Annual Conference. What do I mean by a new Annual Conference? Well, whilst 70% of Counties are represented here this weekend, County delegates, as you all well know, are only permitted by our Royal Charter to take part in the debate - they cannot influence the outcome of Charter or General motions by voting. That power lies only with Branch delegates and there are fewer than 15% of our branches represented at this Conference. This is hardly democracy in action, but I'll go further, unless there is a very good reason why each one of the branches which falls within the 85% that don't think it necessary to attend Annual Conference, then I think that each branch is guilty of a dereliction of duty. And in my dictionary, dereliction of duty is further explained as a shameful failure to fulfil one's obligations in this case to The Royal British Legion."

I am advised that out of all the branches in Gloucestershire only four branches sent a delegate to Conference. These branches were Cheltenham and District, Gloucester City, Staplehill and District and Brockworth and Witcombe. I often hear the cry from members that the staff are taking over the Legion - that in the words of Private Fraser of Dad's Army, the membership is doomed. Another cry that I hear is that the branch cannot afford to send a delegate to conference and then in the same plea, us

branches are not allowed to spend our money except strictly in line with the charter. Well with respect this is one thing that branches can spend their money on.

At the moment such a small element of our total membership attending Conference cannot be right and certainly isn't democratic. Now it might be that a number of your branch members think it is a waste of time and that you feel that Conference is run on the basis of a trade union conference. The Royal British Legion conference is the place for you to go if you want to change the way that the Legion does business because it is quite possible that the members that turn up rather like the idea of "having a crack" at the Trustees each year. But I must tell you that we have some severe limitations in our governance strategy which is holding the Legion back from being an even more successful charity than it already is. So my call to you is come to Conference and let's hear what more of our membership want and make our organisation a membership organisation that we can all be really proud of.

As the respected representatives of your branches I'm asking you to go back and ask your branches to send a delegate to Eastbourne next year and while you are at it start formulating some good substantial motions which will excite the membership and get them really debating what they want of The Legion in the years ahead. I would love to see the Conference Hall so full of delegates that it will give the Conference Committee a real headache of how they are going to seat you all in the Conference Hall. Do nothing and the membership will surely die and that will be a great pity