

Hertfordshire County Conference 2024 - Nairn Johnstone – RBL Director Data & Insights

Good morning, and thank you for welcoming me. I'll provide some highlights from 2023 and share some 2024 priorities.

The King's Coronation

- We were honoured to participate in the Coronation Procession in May to celebrate the Coronation of Their Majesties King Charles III and Queen Camilla.
- We provided a Guard of Honour of 100 Standard Bearers lining the procession route in Parliament Square.
- Our former National President, Lt Gen James Bashall CB CBE, represented RBL at Westminster Abbey.
- We were delighted to be chosen by Their Majesties as one of two charities to receive process from the official album of the Coronation.

Challenges

- The cost-of-living crisis and high inflation had an impact on beneficiaries and our ability to maintain our fundraising levels.
- This has increased the costs of running the charity, reducing the amount of money we have.
- We're financially strong with good reserves. We need to manage our finances well and take out costs to balance our books and remain fit for the future.

Plastic-free poppy

- We launched the plastic-free poppy in April 2023, the biggest redesign in 28 years.
- The new poppy is made entirely from paper and can be easily recycled, demonstrating our commitment to reduce single-use plastic.
- The new poppy was available for the 2023 Poppy Appeal alongside remaining stocks.

Poppy Appeal & Fundraising

- In 2022 Poppy Appeal raised £47.4m. It takes some time to finalise the total for the Poppy Appeal – so far the 2023 amount is £42.8m, although money is still coming in.
- While we didn't quite hit our ambitious target for city poppy days and public cash donations, other elements that make up our Poppy Appeal target, like Gift Aid and supermarket activity, have seen significant improvement.
- Our other fundraising activities, including legacies, individual giving and events, have raised £56.4m against a target of £60.9m.

Remembrance

- In May it was 60 years since the last National Serviceman was demobbed. We brought veterans and their families together at an event at the National Memorial Arboretum (NMA).
- In June we marked 75 years since the Empire Windrush. We partnered with the National Windrush Museum to make sure the service contribution of the Windrush Generation was remembered.
- A special service of remembrance was held in July marking 70 years since the signing of the armistice that ended military operations during the Korean war.
- We paid tribute at the Festival of Remembrance, held two minute silence on Armistice Day, and 9,800 people from around 300 different Armed Forces and civilian associations lined up on Horse Guards Parade for the March Past the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday.

Services

- We've made good progress with the strategic Improving Beneficiary Journeys programme, with resource planning, casework and specialist team restructures and a full training programme delivered.
- We have seen a 35% increase in the number of beneficiaries/households supported during the year, rising from 20,060 in 2021/22 to 26,984 in 2022/23.
- We awarded over £18m in grants to individuals through our case working services.
- We launched a cost-of-living grants programme to support people with the increasing cost of home fuel bills – helping 7,621 beneficiaries with £4,875,502 in support.
- Our specialist compensation team helped secure financial awards of £39 million at appeal tribunals for beneficiaries – an increase of 37% from 2021/22.

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- We expanded our Admiral Nurse service, supporting over 1,700 beneficiaries per month who are facing the challenges of dementia.

Recovery

- We're dedicated to helping ensure the best possible recovery for anyone in the Armed Forces community who has undergone life-changing injuries in military service. Our Battle Back Centre helps wounded, injured and sick veterans and Serving personnel with their recovery journeys, as well as supporting their friends and family.
- We were honoured to run Invictus Team UK. 59 veterans and serving personnel, plus their friends and family, attended the Invictus Games in Dusseldorf last year.

Membership

- Our Membership Directorate has gone through significant change in the last 12-18 months – we are seeing the benefits, including improved branch compliance, data issues and redefined compliance criteria.
- Membership training is now in the Learning & Development team – they have created a new policy and procedures.
- Branch Community Support (BCS) sits in membership – we have a clearer BCS offer, have addressed some safeguarding concerns, and we're addressing training issues. We also have new recruitment materials.
- We have a revised membership complaints process (under the Legion Complaints Committee) and it is hoped we can resolve any issues and concerns swiftly.
- Our Membership reached 194,181 at the end of 2022/23, compared to 202,261 at the end of 2021/22. Our comprehensive Future of Membership programme plans will help us to address this decline.

Campaigning

- The Etherton report was published – an independent review into the military's pre-2000 ban on LGBT personnel. RBL supported LGBT veterans to feed into the review and submitted our own evidence of the appalling treatment of many service people whose lives were affected by the ban.
- The Office for National Statistics (ONS) published information about veteran characteristics as a result of our 'Count Them In' campaign. This data will help our understanding of veterans' needs and experiences allowing us to better plan how we support the Armed Forces community.
- We ran consultation events and surveys to help us develop our manifesto, which we'll use ahead of the election to talk about our priorities.

Evolving our ways of working

- An important part of our One Legion Strategy is how we work together.
- We have worked hard to understand the current culture at RBL, what we want to retain, and what we believe we need to change to make the culture more aligned to our strategic goals.
- A recent improvement is the introduction of revised complaints processes that provide a more supportive and positive relationship across stakeholder groups.

Leadership changes

- New National President, Vice Admiral Sir Clive Johnstone (ret'd) KBE CB replaced Lieutenant General (Ret'd) James Bashall CB CBE, who had served his term in the role.
- Director General, Charles Byrne, stepped down in November 2023. Antony Baines stepped into the interim position and has brought unity to the Executive Board and calmly steered the organisation. Mark Atkinson joins as DG in January 2024.
- Daniel Oppenheimer, Chief Finance Officer, left RBL in October 2023. We appointed two colleagues – Zein Virani and Chris Tingle – to interim positions of Executive Director Corporate Services and Chief Finance Officer.

Looking ahead to 2024

Remembrance

- We'll commemorate many remembrance events this year, most notably D-Day 80. There will be other remembrance activities including Monte Cassino, Kohima, Imphal, the Battle of Normandy, and Operation Market Garden.

Transforming our services

- We'll continue to adapt and evolve, transforming our services to meet current and future beneficiaries' needs. We are embarking on more change so that we remain relevant, whilst continuing to provide services to meet beneficiaries' needs and ensure we're set up for the future.
- Last year we transferred our Care Home care plans and medication management on to electronic systems. This year we'll focus on quality systems and rota management.
- We'll develop a more unifying code of conduct and shared purpose across every part of RBL.
- We will develop better collaborative working between the Board of Trustees and the Executive Board.
- We need to improve confidence in the leadership team, create a stronger and more inclusive leadership, a more respectful workplace, and a more inclusive working environment.
- We need to better understand and manage our relationship with customers, making sure we deliver a consistently great experience. This includes implementing a more robust and modern way of managing customer data.
- Members play a vital role at RBL – we'll nurture the work they do in our communities.
- We'll design the future member journey so we can deliver improvements in affordable, manageable phases. The individual membership and a new digital experience will help us attract the next generation of RBL members.
- We need to modernise our Poppy Appeal, prioritising a refreshed product and volunteer strategy. We'll plan our longer-term transformation, including advances in data and a new customer relationship management system to provide a greater focus on supporter insights.
- We'll continue to effectively manage our finances by introducing changes needed as a result of our cost reduction and income maximisation work.

Invictus Games

- We're already planning for the 2025 Invictus Games taking place in Vancouver, Canada – including team selection and organising training events.

Annual Conference

- Our Annual Conference this year is in Newport, Wales, from 10th – 12th May, and we'll run it as a hybrid event, allowing even more people to attend. We hope to see many of you there.

Thank you

Thank you for your continued support for the work of the Royal British Legion. You've done some tremendous work in the past year supporting and fundraising to help our Armed Forces communities. We look forward to working alongside you in the year ahead as we continue campaigning for our Armed Forces communities, providing support at people's time of need, and make sure that the unique contribution of the Armed Forces community is never forgotten.