

Colonel James Phillips made first Wales Veterans' Commissioner

The Office for Veterans Affairs and the Office of the Secretary of State for Wales have jointly appointed Colonel James Phillips as Veterans' Commissioner for Wales.

Welsh Secretary Simon Hart said he was delighted that James Phillips had been appointed to the role, which will build on the success of counterpart roles in Scotland and Northern Ireland and will mean that all devolved nations have a Veterans' Commissioner.

James will be working to enhance the support for veterans in Wales, as well as scrutinising and advising on government policy for veterans.

The establishment of a Welsh Veterans Commissioner will ensure that the particular needs and contributions of veterans in Wales are represented.

The Veterans' Commissioner will help direct veterans and their families to local support available in areas such as healthcare and mental health provision, housing and employment, as well as assisting charities and advocating for the veteran community in Wales.

The appointment has been announced as Wales celebrates St David's Day and during Wales Week in London, where the UK Government is holding a number of events.

James has just completed his own transition to civilian life after 33 years in the Army. He has served in Germany, Cyprus, The Netherlands, Northern Ireland, the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq. He has commanded soldiers, sailors and air personnel and worked in NATO, MOD, Joint and Army Headquarters. He is married and lives in Pembrokeshire with 4 children and a very boisterous Welsh Springer Spaniel.

The Veterans' Commissioner for Wales, Colonel James Phillips said:

As a veteran of more than thirty years' service, I am very excited to be appointed as the first Veterans' Commissioner for Wales. The ex-forces community forms an important part of Welsh society and there is a long tradition of service and sacrifice. I will utilise my experience and position to improve the lives of all veterans and their families.

Secretary of State for Wales Simon Hart said:

The Armed Forces have a long and important tradition in Wales and

we are exceptionally proud of our Welsh veterans. Our ex-servicemen and women and their families deserve recognition, support and respect throughout the duration of their service and beyond.

The appointment of a Veterans' Commissioner for Wales will increase and coordinate the support available and highlights the UK Government's commitment to the welfare of the men and women who serve in our Armed Forces.

I am delighted that we could make this hugely important announcement on St David's Day.

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Steve Barclay said:

We want to ensure that veterans across all corners of the United Kingdom have access to high quality support.

The appointment of Colonel Phillips to this role now means that all parts of the UK have commissioners to champion veterans across society and hold the public sector to account.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Leo Docherty said:

This appointment delivers on a key part of our Veterans' Strategy Action Plan and I look forward to working with Colonel Phillips.

I know they will work hard to represent veterans in Wales – driving forward support for them across the country, whether it is housing, employment or healthcare.

Welsh Government Deputy Minister for Social Partnership, Hannah Blythyn said:

Wales provides a wide range of support for veterans – from NHS Veterans Wales to our Armed Forces Liaison Officers – and we are committed to working with stakeholders to supporting all those who have served.

The Veterans' Commissioner for Wales is a UK Government appointment. We look forward to working with Colonel James Phillips as part of our commitment to veterans across Wales.

Colonel Phillips will be reporting directly to the Secretary of State for Wales, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Steve Barclay and Minister for Defence, People and Veterans Leo Docherty.

In January the Office for Veterans' Affairs launched the government's Veterans Strategy Action Plan. Commitments in the plan relating to Wales include:

- Stepping up data and understanding of the veterans' cohort in Wales, through the first veterans question in last year's Census in England and Wales. This will allow us to publish insights developed from the census data across a range of topics affecting veterans and their families, from health and wellbeing to housing and employment.
- The Welsh Government continuing to support the Veterans NHS Wales specialist mental healthcare service and Veterans Trauma Network (VTN) Wales service for veterans with complex physical injuries.
- The Welsh Government will work with Armed Forces Liaison Officers (AFLOs) and partners including regional suicide and self-harm prevention coordinators to promote mental health first aid training.
- The Welsh Government will review and publish a new Armed Forces Covenant, Healthcare Priority for Veterans Guidance, subject to UK developments including the Armed Forces Bill.