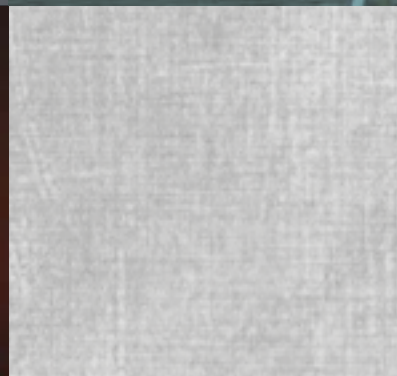
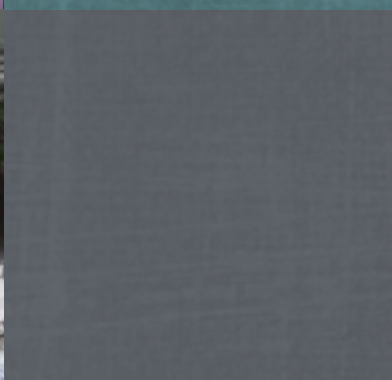


RFCA
Northern Ireland

**CONNECTING
WITH THE
COMMUNITY**

RESERVE FORCES AND CADETS ASSOCIATION for Northern Ireland

ANNUAL REPORT A REVIEW OF 2020/21



CHAIRMAN

As Chair of the Board I welcome this opportunity to thank the Chief Executive and all of the staff within RFCA NI for their determined and effective work during the past year or so, in the face of an unprecedented pandemic.

In particular, thanks go to all the adult instructors of the cadet movement whose impressive initiatives, use of virtual platforms and dedication have kept our cadets engaged and interested, even though they had to spend considerable periods in isolation during the pandemic without face-to-face training with their peers.

I would like to offer warm and sincere congratulations to those cadets who were finally able to have received their certificates from their Lord Lieutenants at a special socially distanced ceremony hosted by Lord Caledon, within Caledon Estate. This was an auspicious occasion thoroughly enjoyed by everyone who attended. The adult recipients of the prestigious Lord Lieutenants' Certificates are also to be congratulated as they too, were finally able to receive their certificates across three special ceremonies at Hillsborough; again another superb occasion for everyone who attended.

Thanks are also due to Commander Professor Alastair Adair of the Ulster University whose tireless lobbying of the Royal Navy on behalf of both universities and RFCA NI has been successful in that the Royal Navy has now established The Universities Royal Navy Unit, Belfast and recruiting has commenced in both universities. As a result, all three services now have established Units in the Northern Ireland Universities. The RFCA Reform arising out of The Sullivan Review continues to process at a slow pace. I have circulated a letter received written by The Chair of the Council of RFCAs, The Right Honourable, Lord de Mauley as an effective update setting out the current situation.



It may well be that the target date of April 2023, as regards implementation of the reform, will slip twelve months. The reform requires primary legislation to be implemented and the MOD must bid for parliamentary time to present it to Parliament when a busy legislative programme is already planned by the government.

Lord De Mauley states that he is confident that work in hand will enable us, the membership, to be retained as central to the organisation. This has to be the Chair of this Association's priority during the next twelve months. Lord De Mauley also says that many uncontentious reforms have already been completed. The Northern Ireland Association has embraced these changes. Tasked with increasing diversity and achieving equality within the membership, we have set aside the present cap on membership of 125 because of the number of posts that is specified by appointment, for example Commanding Officers and local councillors. A test of skill and experience has been applied to widen the diversity and equality of the membership and a new confidential voting system is now in place.

The business case that has gone forward for the creation of the NDPB, the reformed RFCA, states that the role of the RFCA will be, employer and civic engagement, youth and cadets, management of the volunteer estate and the provision of expert advice. It has yet to be determined what is meant by 'expert advice'. Notably, welfare support to Northern Ireland Veterans of the Armed Forces is not included.

I have written to The Veteran's Commissioner asking him to give best effort and lobby the MOD energetically to achieve a viable solution to this problem and thus avoid the social disaster which could ensue if no home is found for the VSO.

I am pleased to say that RFCA NI is in a good place generally and there are many positive and encouraging signs for the future.

G C Chesney Chairman



CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Although this report is written in the main to reflect the specific work of RFCA NI over the past year, I am mindful of our wider

responsibilities and contributions in support of Reserves and Cadets in Northern Ireland and, indeed, the wider Defence family and, notably, our Veterans. Our role in supporting veterans brings particular challenges which I will highlight as I review the activities of our staff during that past year.

Let me begin, however, by focusing on our primary 'constituency', namely Reserves and Cadets. While many of their achievements are covered elsewhere in this report, I would like to highlight and commend their impressive response to the challenge of working against the unprecedented backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Across Northern Ireland units have done everything they can to stay in touch with their reservists through virtual training and engagement initiatives, and with some impressively innovative approaches to training. Thankfully, our units have, at the time of writing, all returned to running relatively normal programmes, with camps once again being conducted across the UK.

We are delighted to note that great use is already being made of HMS HALFORD, the Thiepval navigational and maritime procedures training facility in Thiepval for which RFCA secured funding. There is no doubt that numbers have been adversely affected during the pandemic as individuals 'lost the habit', but attendance is being steadily rebuilt. The picture varies across Northern Ireland and there is clearly much work to do.

As this Report details, the year just past has seen an impressive list of overseas as well as UK-based operational deployments over and above the significant numbers on Op RESCRIPT (the MOD's support to the nation during the COVID pandemic). 502 Sqn alone has deployed 22 individuals on RESCRIPT, an extraordinarily high proportion of its overall numbers. Other deployments include soldiers on Op TOSCA in Cyprus, Op CABRIT in Estonia and Op SHADER in Iraq; sailors in the Persian Gulf and the Caribbean on HMS MEDWAY; on HMS TRENT in Gibraltar, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea as well

as the Carrier Strike Group in the Far East and airmen and women on Op TORAL in Afghanistan, the Falkland Islands; Op KIPPON in IRAQ and on Op PITTING - the extraction of UK nationals and refugees from Afghanistan. A Squadron Leader also deployed as the lead primary health care specialist on Ex SPRINGHAWK supporting the Red Arrows.

Concerns over recruiting levels for the Army Reserve continue to be writ large across the UK. While levels for the Royal Navy and RAF raise fewer concerns, they appear to have flat-lined. Here in Northern Ireland, things are a little rosier, although some recruiting challenges stubbornly remain. Medical units in particular face difficulties in maintaining their desired activity levels at a time when so many of their reservists are facing huge demands in their civilian workplaces. In response this is an area in which we are endeavouring to add transferrable value, for example as NI prepares its contribution towards projected deployment in Mali late next year. We await details of how the recently completed Integrated Review will affect the Reserve in general and individual units in particular but, with the reduction of regular numbers by c.10,000 from c.82,000 and with no change in delivery of capability, the future expectation for and of the Reserve is evident.

Throughout, whether the activity was on operations, exercise, training or deployments, our Northern Ireland reservists have maintained the platinum standards which have come to be their trademark in support of Defence outputs.

Turning to the Cadets; despite some extraordinary and admirable programmes of engagement throughout the pandemic, numbers across the cadet organisations have inevitably decreased. However, we are already seeing rapid return and projections are going in the right direction and, already, all CCFs are back up and running and reporting good numbers.

Encouragingly, adult volunteer recruiting is exceptional, the principal challenge being the processing of new applications and induction of new volunteers. All of that applies to all cadet movements, although the Sea Cadets do seem to be in a remarkably good position.

I am also delighted to report that we are in active discussion with The Commander 38 (Irish) Brigade who has been swift to identify the value of cadet membership to young people themselves, to the

Services and to society more widely. He is keen to explore how the Defence family might explore and support these benefits to best effect, considering all cadet movements and possibilities for expansion of activities, accessing more resources or recalibration: an exciting and welcome project.

Turning to the Association's specific outputs, we have recently emerged from the Reserve Estate Optimisation Programme which will address Northern Ireland's historical under-scaling and under-provision of facilities for our established numbers. For the future this will give us greatly enhanced facilities in a number of reserve and cadet locations in addition to an ambitious multi-million extension to Hydebanks.

However, we carry great risk – finally recognised by the Council of RFCAs as such – with understaffing in our Estates Department where pressure comes not so much from the capital works side, but with the increasingly demanding assurance work associated with our maintenance and inspection tasks. In short, we have been formally recognised to be a minimum of three staff short of required levels. Recruiting has been delayed pending ongoing reviews of Estates Department structures across all RFCAs, but in the interim our staff are buckling down to daunting workloads, with junior ones really proving themselves.

On youth and cadets, our Pathways Programme is back up and running with 17,832 individuals from 197 organisations having been involved in some sort of activity over the past six months. Indeed, despite restrictions, the team was fully and continuously booked from late spring throughout the summer, fully complying with pandemic restrictions but clearly helped by being outdoors.

It is clear that we must work hard to secure the future of the innovative Pathways Programme, responding positively to guidance on oversight of costs and exploring wider sources of revenue to ensure its continuing viability.

Our Permanent Support Staff have done brilliantly well in support of cadets, fulfilling three primary functions. They provide the logistics and administration, including maintenance and preparation of facilities and kit, without which no activity can happen; they offer direct advice, help and support in setting up activities and they support, mentor, encourage and, ultimately, empower, adult volunteers. All of this has been critical in the road

back from COVID, but not least that latter function which I must emphasise is a particular 'USP' of our PSS in Northern Ireland.

In terms of Employer Engagement this has proved a busier year than originally anticipated, which can be attributed to an increase in activities within the Reserve generally, and to support of Op RESCRIPT in particular.

Notable within our Employer Engagement remit we are leading, in conjunction with the Office of Veterans Affairs, an exploration of how our existing employer networks might be mobilised in support of veterans' employment. Early days, but much more to come in that area.

Against the backdrop of pandemic restrictions, the communications team has had to exercise ingenuity in exploiting a more limited amount of material – inevitable with a lower tempo of activities – but has done so with gusto and imagination. This has proved important in supporting reserves and cadets, particularly as they emerge from pandemic restrictions and focus on rebuilding numbers. We are fortunate to have built up exceptional social media teams and I am encouraged that most units have embraced the support we can offer.

At this point that I must underscore the excellent level of co-operation we have in terms of engagement across the whole of Defence in NI. While it is, in part, a reflection of our size and sensitivities, I believe its scope and depth mark it out exceptional within the UK and we must all welcome its continuing improvement.

When it comes to support for veterans our team simply 'works its socks off', because the demand is infinite!

The NI Executive is currently not in a position to deliver the sort of bespoke support to veterans which has been established in the UK which leaves our local community groups and charities, along with the Royal Irish Aftercare Service, to deliver at a time when their own resources are increasingly stretched. Adding to complexity, our veterans themselves – many living within what they see as their erstwhile combat zone and with associated security related issues – have enhanced needs.

The Veterans' Support Office (VSO) works to hold of this together, dealing with individual cases as need dictates and working with all delivery bodies across

the province to optimise available support. They also work with our 11 veterans champions and of course the Commissioner and his team in the process. The team has been brilliant and the initiatives they have come up with are making a real difference to the lives of veterans. To give a flavour they have tackled the setting up and management of local support hubs, facilitated the Mental Health Forum, a veterans' Commissioner's initiative and the training programmes focussed on the veterans' champions and they drive The Defence Gardens Scheme.

Currently they are working on the upcoming 24-hour health line being delivered through the Somme Nursing Home and they are behind The Veterans Places, Pathways and People Programme which aims to roll out an £800k programme of mental health support in a co-ordinated manner across NI over the next two years.

The MOD has recognised the value and importance of the VSO. But its resources are limited and its formal mandate remains unclear; factors which help explain the gap between what the VSO has achieved and what it needs to achieve. We are therefore focussed on securing its future, ensuring it has the authority,

responsibilities and resources it needs to help underwrite the support our veterans deserve, whether or not all of that sits within future RFCA remit.

The challenges we have faced in the past year demonstrate the commitment and dedication of our staff whilst underscoring the fact that we are wafer thin in our staffing in relation to what is expected of us and everyone must continue consistently work at their optimum level. I must thank our Administration and Finance staff for all that they do in keeping us afloat.

In conclusion I pay tribute to the support of the membership, the Board and its committees. I would also highlight the support of Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenants who have been particularly flexible and encouraging this year, and thank Lord Caledon for his hosting of the Cadet. Finally, we could not produce what we do without the support, co-operation and friendship of all our units and the three single Services.

Colonel J W Rollins MBE Chief Executive

RESERVES

The year just past proved unprecedented in terms of reserve activity under the increasingly challenging constraints of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Although restrictions certainly curtailed the reserves' activity they, by no means, prevented them from conducting vital training and tasks, from a global, national, and regional perspective. All ranks became accustomed to the Teams, Zoom and other online training delivery methods as we adapted and seamlessly shifted online to deliver some first-class and highly innovative levels of training.

During the past eighteen months we have witnessed reserves being mobilised on a global front from all three services from across the Northern Ireland garrison. We notably supported Op RESCRIPT, as Military Aid To The Civil Authorities (MACA), by providing the Department of Health in Northern Ireland with hospital Liaison Officers and drivers. The success of this venture boosted the capacity for reservists to support local emergencies.

In Northern Ireland, 110 Combat Medical Technicians were deployed for five weeks in support of frontline nursing staff across three NI hospitals. The deployment was called Project Baird, after the famous local Mary Baird, who was a military nurse in WWII. All three phases of Project Baird have been supported by 2 R IRISH, 253 Med Regt, 502 (Ulster) Sqn RAuxAF and HMS HIBERNIA and, as we work through the third phase, it now looks as though it will be repeated over the winter as flu impacts on communities across Northern Ireland.

Other mobilisations have been seen under Op TOSCA in Cyprus, Op CABRIT and Op SHADER in Iraq and Syria.

From the RNR perspective, the construction of HMS HALFORD for navigational and maritime procedures training has delivered a singular capability which does not exist elsewhere in the UK. Mobilisations have been undertaken to the Persian Gulf and the Caribbean on HMS MEDWAY; another rating has been deployed on HMS TRENT (in Gibraltar and the Mediterranean as well as the Black Sea and the Ukraine) and one of their logisticians has been mobilised in support of the Carrier Strike Group (led by HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH) and will have a number of ports of call out to the Far East. In addition officers and ratings have attended the new training programme at HMS RALEIGH during the summer,



with a number of recruits progressing to The Britannia Royal Naval College (BRNC) in Dartmouth.

The Army Reserves (AR) have also been busy throughout and, with special dispensations, Army Training Unit (NI) (ATU) has been able to successfully modify and deliver basic training with a steady number attending and successfully passing their courses. The success is a considerable testament to the dedication and professional perseverance all those personnel involved in the engaging, recruiting and subsequent delivery of training to our new Reservists.

In August 502 (Ulster) Sqn RAuxAF has, with the welcomed easing of restrictions, completed a 2-day Live Firing Range Practice at Ballykinler, ably supported by ATU(NI): a great example of inter-Service cooperation and 'Team NI' in action. Also in August, the Squadron completed an Adventurous Training period at Castlewellan, then participated in a Joint Helicopter Command exercise (EX AUTUMN KITE) at RAF Spadeadam alongside colleagues from 606 Sqn RAuxAF and has now resumed face-to-face training weekends. Mobilisation from the squadron has seen 22 personnel support the early Op RESCRIPT deployments in support of NHS testing in NW England and Op TORAL (Afghanistan) with staff present in the Falkland Islands. A Squadron member was deployed on Op KIPION (IRAQ) which also featured in Op PITTING (the extraction of UK nationals and refugees from Afghanistan), travelling to the UK through the Gulf and, additionally, one of the Squadron Leaders deployed as the lead primary health care specialist on Ex SPRINGHAWK supporting the Red Arrows on their practice deployment.

Overall, whether the activity was on operations, exercise, training or deployments, our Northern Ireland reservists have maintained the platinum standards which have come to be their trademark in support of Defence outputs.



The Royal Navy

For many months the ship's company of HMS HIBERNIA has become increasingly adept with TEAMS, Skype, ZOOM and a number of other tools as we harnessed the internet to keep in contact and continue development within the Naval Reserve.

More recently we have been transitioning back to normality and we have, in particular, been delighted to welcome on board a steady influx of new talent that has been regularly undertaking Initial Naval Training at home in Northern Ireland and at HMS Raleigh and Britannia Royal Naval College.

A number of Maritime Reservists have mobilised on Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPV's). Notably mobilisation has taken one of our Able (AB) Seaman from the North Coast of Northern Ireland to the Caribbean. Her ship, HMS MEDWAY, has been conducting anti-narcotics patrols and recently had some time alongside in Florida before returning to continue its hunt for drug smugglers. Another female AB is currently deployed on HMS TRENT which has been assigned to Gibraltar as its home base port. The ship however has been operating in the Black Sea and has had a port visit to Ukraine where defence diplomacy was conducted with the Ukrainian Military by way of a Ship's Capability demonstration.

One of our HIBERNIAN Logicians has joined Carrier Strike Group 21 under the lead of the QUEEN ELIZABETH Carrier (QEC). Her role will see her 'jump ahead' of the ship to various far-flung locations across Europe, the Middle and Far East to help ensure stores and provisions are on hand for the ship's arrival; a thrilling opportunity to see the world and support wider UK Defence interests. The Unit's Training Officer has also mobilised to Join the QEC as a Submarine Liaison Officer for a number of months. Closer to home, some of the Ships Company have been assisting with OPERATION RESCRIPT (Pandemic Support). One Officer assisted the NI civil authorities with the deployment of Army and Navy Medics supporting the NHS, while another aided the RNR nationally by helping to coordinate the UK's Maritime Reserve response to Covid. The Unit's Operations Officer was deployed to Scotland to support Senior planners in NHS Scotland and the Scottish Government with Military Aid to the Civil Authorities (MACA).

The great news is that, in line with Government, NHS and Military direction, all our Maritime Reserves will return to in Unit training by the end of June 2021. In place to welcome them back will be a new Training Ship based in Lisburn, perfectly designed and equipped to help them improve their seamanship skills in a safe and controlled manner.



The Royal Air Force

The COVID-19 pandemic and the associated levels of lock-down implemented since March 2020 may have constrained the Squadron's ability to operate to optimum level, but we have nevertheless continued to recruit and to deliver face-to-face and virtual training as well as mobilizing personnel in support to the Whole Force across the United Kingdom and to operational theatres overseas. Meeting the challenge of adjusting to the 'new normal', the Squadron has sustained output with minimal disruption.

Several of our Part-Time Volunteer Reserves (PTVRs) have been on the 'COVID Front Line' in their civilian roles working with the Health & Social Care Trusts in intensive care units, laboratories and on COVID-19 wards. The professionalism, compassion and selfless dedication they have shown during the worst medical crisis in modern history has been an example to us all and the Squadron is immensely proud of all that they achieved as they cared for their patients and protected our communities.

During the year the Squadron mobilised 36 PTVRs to a wide variety of operational and unit assistance roles. The positive uptake in opportunities marked a 125% increase in the number committing to mobilization during 2019/20 when 16 PTVRs (part-time volunteer reservists) mobilised.



In response to Op RESCRIPT, 11 Squadron personnel mobilised to work alongside reservists from sister General Service Support squadrons (602, 607 and 611) to deliver 2 mobile testing units in the North West of England. The only RAF team in the area, they used specially-equipped vehicles to set up testing sites, delivering more than 8,000 COVID tests to members of the public at 89 locations during the 4-month deployment.

The personnel from 502 Sqn completed a myriad of duties within a challenging and austere environment, drawing upon their 'civilian' skillsets, military professionalism, resolute spirit and sense of duty to complete the task. WO Hotson, 502 Squadron Warrant Officer led the combined team and co-ordinated all activity through JMC(NW). In addition two Squadron personnel worked with the COVID-19 Support Force at RAF Brize Norton and the Scottish Government in Edinburgh respectively.

In March 2021, under Project BAIRD, two Squadron personnel were part of the military support team provided to assist the NHS here in Belfast to increase clinical capability in order to deliver a mass vaccination programme from Belfast's SSE Arena. Operating within their specialist fields, other Squadron personnel were mobilised to Romania in support of the NATO Air Policing mission in (Op AZOTIZE); to RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus (Op SHADER) and to RAF Mount Pleasant in the Falkland Islands to provide police, flight operations and logistical support. Squadron personnel have also supported flight operations at RAF Lossiemouth, and several of our General Technicians (Electrical) have completed routine tasks at RAF Coningsby. The Squadron's Logs (Chef) component supported 3MCS, RAF Wittering, alongside personnel from the Logs (Sup) Flt who provided significant support at RAF Benson and Waddington.

Squadron personnel have also supported a variety of exercises, including Ex JOINT WARRIOR (Prestwick); Ex GRIFFIN ENDEAVOUR (RAF Honington); Ex WESSEX STORM (Keevil Airfield); Ex GROUPEX (RAF Marham), Op BOLTHOLE (RAF Lossiemouth) and Op ASKER (RAF Boulmer). SAC Meally, Logs (Chef), volunteered to support the Royal Marine Reserve at Dorset House in Bristol and, such was the standard of his contribution, that the Commanding Officer wrote to the Sqn to commend him for his work. Sqn Ldr Winter (Anaesthetist) participated in 612 Sqn's Ex CALEDONIAN FORGE and Sqn Ldr Cairns (Media) joined the CIOR Congress in Estonia.

Our deliberate focus on recruiting has brought 19 new people into RAF Service. Allied to this, 23 new recruits have progressed through initial training, benefitting from the intelligent use of online tools to



deliver course material and lessons remotely.

Beyond this, our PTVRs have yet again shown that they remain eager to engage with and take all opportunities presented, as demonstrated by their response to calls to support Op RESCRIPT, Op WINTER PREPARE and other potential (local) tasks to support the civilian authorities. Consequently, Squadron morale and fighting spirit remain resolute, with outstanding unit cohesion underpinning increased mobilisation and spurring our people on to renew their commitment.

The year ended with 87 (96%) of eligible PTVRs being awarded the annual Certificate of Efficiency. This marked a 14% increase on 2019/20 when 83 (82%)



achieved the required standard. Given the severe restrictions which COVID-19 placed on training opportunities, the Squadron is justifiably proud of this achievement.



In delivering against myriad tasks, often in difficult circumstance, our Reservists respond with enthusiasm and assured confidence, embodying both the Sqn motto 'Nihil Timeo' (I Fear Nothing!) and that of the RAuxAF 'Comitamur Ad Astra' as they work alongside their Regular colleagues of the RAF.



EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

Defence Relationship Management (DRM) exists to offer advice and support on employing members of the armed forces

community, enabling companies and organisations to develop a mutually beneficial working relationship with the MOD through a long-term approach to relationship management.

A draft amended NI directive on the Delivery of the Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) has been lodged with MoD, and it is hoped that 2022 will see that Directive agreed and enacted.

Our Regional Employer Engagement Group (REEG) continues to act as a regional force multiplier in our effort to engage with and assist in the delivery of the MOD's Employer Engagement Strategy; to ensure that the MOD maintains sound relations with employers and to ensure that defence personnel benefit from this enhanced relationship. Under the Chairmanship of Mr T Salmon OBE, the REEG has been meeting regularly, providing a forum for discussion and feedback on the issues which affect employers of reservists in Northern Ireland and offering guidance and feedback to policy-makers.

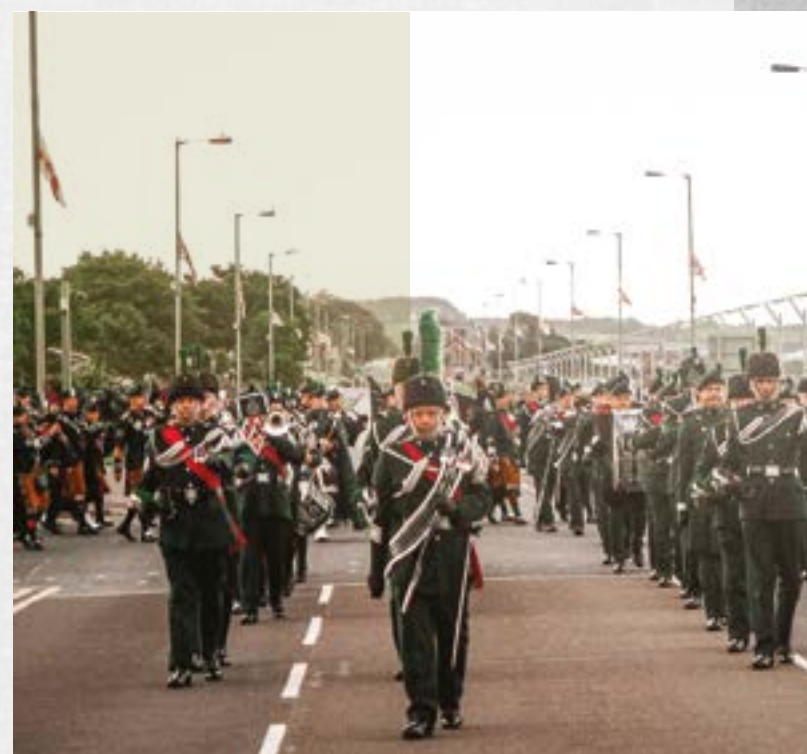
Similar to the REEG, the Health Committee, Chaired by Professor M Bradley OBE DL, acts as a regional force multiplier, but firmly focussed on the Health sector. In particular, the Committee looks at how best to balance the needs of the respective Health & Social Care Trusts (HSCTs) with those of individual reservists employed by the HSCTs and the MOD within Northern Ireland. This extends to issues surrounding recruiting and exposure of the HSCTs to the skills required – particularly in the area of trauma medicine and nursing – within the Armed Services. Although recent circumstances have prevented the Committee from meeting frequently, our advocates within the HSCTs continue to champion defence and disseminate information on our behalf.

The Further and Higher Education Committee (H&FEC) exists to promote a more effective partnership between third level educational institutions and the MOD. Together, RFCA and H&FEC seek to establish 'joined up' and timely communication and transparency and clarity within relationships and activities in order to develop and maintain long-term relationships and optimise opportunities as well as avoiding duplication or potential confusion in the minds of stakeholders. The work of the Committee is outwith that of the Military

Education Committee (MEC), although each takes cognisance of the other's roles and activities, de-conflicting and co-operating as necessary. Chaired by Professor A Adair CBE, the committee has met regularly and is improving engagement within the higher education sector.

The tempo of mobilisation increased during 2020 due to OPERATION RESCRIPT and other Operational needs across the globe and Reserves from all three services continue to be mobilised. Although mobilisation increased, the caseload remains light due to the unwavering support Northern Ireland's employers give to their Reservist employees.

Although Northern Ireland personnel remain exempt from compulsory Employer Notification (EN), reserves are encouraged whenever possible, to 'opt



in'. Consequently, with the consent of the individual reservist, employers are notified, in line with JSP 766. Year-on-year we see a slight growth in the number of Reserves 'opting' in to EN with the resulting increase in the capture of relevant information.

Due to the pandemic, face-to-face Employer Engagements events were necessarily limited. However employers were enabled 'virtually' to attend the Defence Insight Brief, the Partnering with Defence Conference and the Annual MEC lecture, connecting online. Small groups of employers were also able to participate in the visits of HMS EXAMPLE, HMS ARCHER and HMS PEMBROKE, while others viewed the Massed Bands of the Irish Regiments in Carrickfergus.

Civil Engagement

The delivery of Community Engagement (CE) has proved particularly challenging this year due to the restrictions surrounding COVID 19 but we have continued to work closely with 38 (Irish) Brigade and the regional representatives within the Royal Navy and the RAF and, together, have risen to meet those unprecedented communications challenges.

Working with Mid and East Antrim Borough Council and were able to support and deliver a hybrid Armed Forces Day in Carrickfergus in June 2021. Many events took place virtually while, on the day, scaled down versions of the more usual Armed Forces Day events were held at the town's War memorial area and the local leisure centre. Whilst complying fully with restrictions, members of the public were able to get close to several military assets, recruitment stands for both Cadets and Reservists and even had a chance to meet the established family favourite, the Irish Guard Mascot, the Irish Wolfhound known informally as Seamus. A massive and much appreciated highlight of the day was the flyover by the Red Arrows who twice soared above the town leaving trails of their trademark red white and blue smoke in the skies and thrilled spectators at ground level.

Carrickfergus was also the backdrop in September for

a spectacular evening of Music by the Massed Bands. This was a special socially distanced event which saw all four Military bands perform against the backdrop of the historic Norman Castle, the first time the Army's four Irish Regiments - the Irish Guards, the Royal Irish Regiments alongside the pipes and drums of the Royal Dragoon Guards and the Queen's Royal Hussars - had



performed together in Northern Ireland in over 35 years. The bands were accompanied by students from Campbell College Army Cadet Force and the evening included memorable performances from a choir of Fijian soldiers who serve in Irish regiments and displays of traditional Scottish dancing and Irish dancing.

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

This year, in response to the restrictions surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, the RFCA NI Communications and Marketing team has adapted the ways in which it engages with its diverse audiences, temporarily moving away from traditional face-to-face marketing and promotional methods in favour of increased online activity, particularly in relation to providing support for recruitment of both cadets and reservists. Targeting digital marketing campaigns to individuals who spent more time at home throughout 2020/21 proved successful with improved response to engagement activity and interaction rates.

The RFCA Northern Ireland Social Media 'Snapshot' for the year 2020/21 shows an audience reach of 5,594,439, an increase of 2,817,857 from 2018/19. In terms of digital marketing RFCA NI continues to be the UK's best performing RFCA, as assessed by Hootsuite, the independent social media management tool.



Instagram
67,000



Facebook
3,987,805



Twitter
1,410,241



Website
129,393

The cost-effective use of key Social Media platforms including Facebook Ads, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter enabled us to deliver our key messages directly and instantaneously straight to the devices of our target audiences, as well as creating opportunities engage further by driving visitors to our website.



Most recently we developed a highly effective Reservist Recruitment campaign, promoting a series of recruitment opportunities across Northern Ireland. This was highly effective, demonstrating the success of digital marketing not only in increasing engagement numbers, but also in providing avenues of communication for those who would prefer to engage outside a public event.

As more Cadet Detachments and Reserve units across the tri-services take part in media and PR training, we have seen a corresponding upturn in positive coverage across local newspapers, with success generated by energetic Public Relations Officers prepared to engage directly with their local newspapers and community news platforms to share their stories.

This year the Communications and Marketing team has been heavily engaged in devising Social Media and Digital Marketing training workshops and presentations for our tri-service colleagues to promote and increase awareness and build capabilities. The team's video and photographic services have also been in high demand, covering key events such as the presentation of The Lord Lieutenants' Awards, VE Day 75th Anniversary & Armed Forces Day in Carrickfergus, the RAF Wings Appeal Launch at Belfast City Hall, Universities' Royal Naval Unit launch; the 'In This Together' social media togetherness and mental wellbeing campaign the Massed Bands of the Irish Regiments in Carrickfergus and Remembrance Sunday at Belfast City Hall.

Communications and Marketing continues to offer support across the tri-service Reserves and Cadets and welcomes the opportunity to discuss events and initiatives.

Visit our website: reservesandcadetsni.org.uk



CADET OVERVIEW

Across Northern Ireland the creativity of cadet leaders and the enthusiasm of our cadets kept our flame well and truly burning despite the havoc of COVID-19 restrictions.

Many of the online events and activities developed by the Cadet Forces Adult Volunteers (CFAVs) have been nothing short of ingenious, notably inspirational virtual battlefield tours of Arnhem and the Somme and an excellent portrayal of last year's Battle of Britain celebrations using a variety of media, including cartoons! It should be remembered that the delivery methods and programming which created these and other digital success stories were engineered by CFAVs who manage busy day jobs and family lives alongside their dedication to the cadet movement.

More than 200 CFAVs 'aged out' during the COVID restrictions, but the inflow of new talent has met that outflow and the recent opportunity to return to face-to-face training has demonstrated that there is still a thirst for the cadet experience.

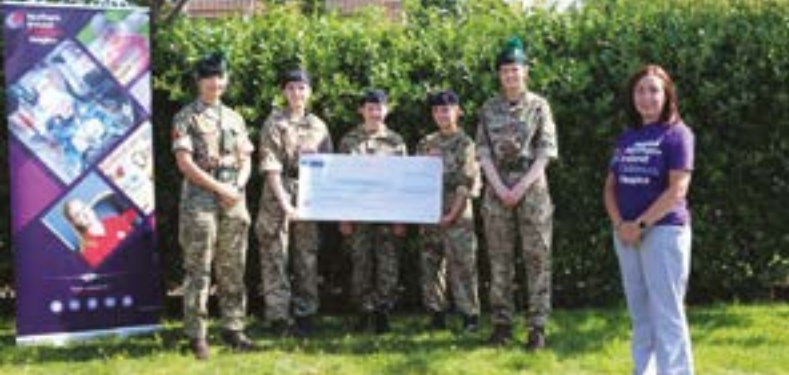
Whilst there was an aspiration for an element of summer camps to be retained, COVID restrictions meant that this traditional highlight of the Cadet year had to be abandoned and replaced by one-day events throughout the summer, with some detachments continuing to meet when there would have been a summer break under normal circumstances. Here again, the commitment of both CFAVs and cadets proved inexhaustible, sustaining enthusiasm. As we return to training in its entirety we believe that the Autumn/Winter school term will give us a strong indication of how cadet recruitment will develop.

On the youth activity front the landscape began to change on 24 May with an easing of restrictions on outdoor activities. Progressive easing up to mid-August enabled our Pathways programme to deliver 12,000+ places to more 115 youth organisations, Primary and Post-Primary schools, community groups, service families, veterans and troops returning from Op TOSCA.

The Combined Cadet Force

The Combined Cadet Force (CCF) in Northern Ireland has welcomed several new members into its family in recent years under the government-sponsored Cadet Expansion Programme (CEP). This expansion can only be good for the cadet movement, creating more opportunities for young people in these very strange and difficult times.

The disruption within schools due to the Covid 19 pandemic has had a significant impact on both the Cadet Force Adult Volunteers (CFAV) and cadets



alike. The effect is most noticeable with regard to the experience levels of cadets at both junior and senior levels, reflecting regrettable fact that, as a result of pandemic restrictions, they did not have opportunities to advance through the usual promotional structure within the contingents and gain the leadership qualities as those before them would have done. As a result the skill set for all cadets is presently rather lower than it previously was.

Government guidelines to schools necessarily adversely affected on all extra-curricular activities available including the cadets. As restrictions have changed and/or lifted our contingents followed direction from their respective school principal, with varying degrees of engagement inevitable.

Thanks to the commitment and active involvement of the 38 (Irish) Brigade Cadet Training Team, Adult Volunteers from both legacy and expansion schools had the opportunity to attend mandatory training and



also to gain additional qualifications in a number of key skill areas. The Schools Cadet Expansion Officer within RFCA NI continues to support Phase 3 of the Expansion and Growth element of the CEP, with many of the newer CEP schools are already parading ahead of their projected numbers – on occasion with 60+ cadets against predicted numbers of 30-40 cadets at this stage. This enthusiastic uptake



is entirely in keeping with the stated intent of the Commander 38 (Irish) Brigade's intent to expand the number of cadets across Northern Ireland.

Despite restrictions, a number of CCF contingents did manage to offer summer camps this year, albeit within school campuses or in local defence estate facilities Northern Ireland, rather than in GB CCF camps. All proved extremely successful with cadets



thoroughly enjoying the experience.

In summery it is fair to say that all CCF contingents are excited about the return to face to face training commencing and Cadet engagement which will build during the Christmas term. Planning within all contingents for Christmas term 2021 is at an advanced stage and has already



Northern Ireland CCF contingents

The Legacy schools	Expansion Schools
Bangor CCF	Bloomfield Collegiate CCF
Campbell College CCF	Larne High School CCF
Foyle CCF	Laurelhill Community CCF
College	Lisnagarvey High School CCF
RBAI CCF	Priory Integrated College CCF
Royal School Armagh	Strathearn School CCF



ESTATES

The implementation of challenging new access control policies has increased the complexity of delivering Estates services in Northern Ireland. In response, the Estates team has undertaken significant planning and coordination to deliver compliance, ensuring that maintenance and works services are delivered on schedule by frequently reviewing and processing contractor clearances and maintaining regular dialogue with Contracts Managers.

The Reserve Forces & Cadets Association Estate Optimisation Programme (REOP) ratified the local RFCA estate requirements and a range of Capital Departmental Expenditure Limits (CDEL) schemes to address shortfalls in existing infrastructure have been captured and are earmarked for funding in the short-term. It is hoped these will address chronic infrastructure constraints and ensure all areas of the Province have access to infrastructure which is fit for purpose.

It is envisaged that three new capital build projects will complete or near completion within the current financial year: an extensive extension at Hydebank and refurbishments at both Enniskillen and Coleraine sites..

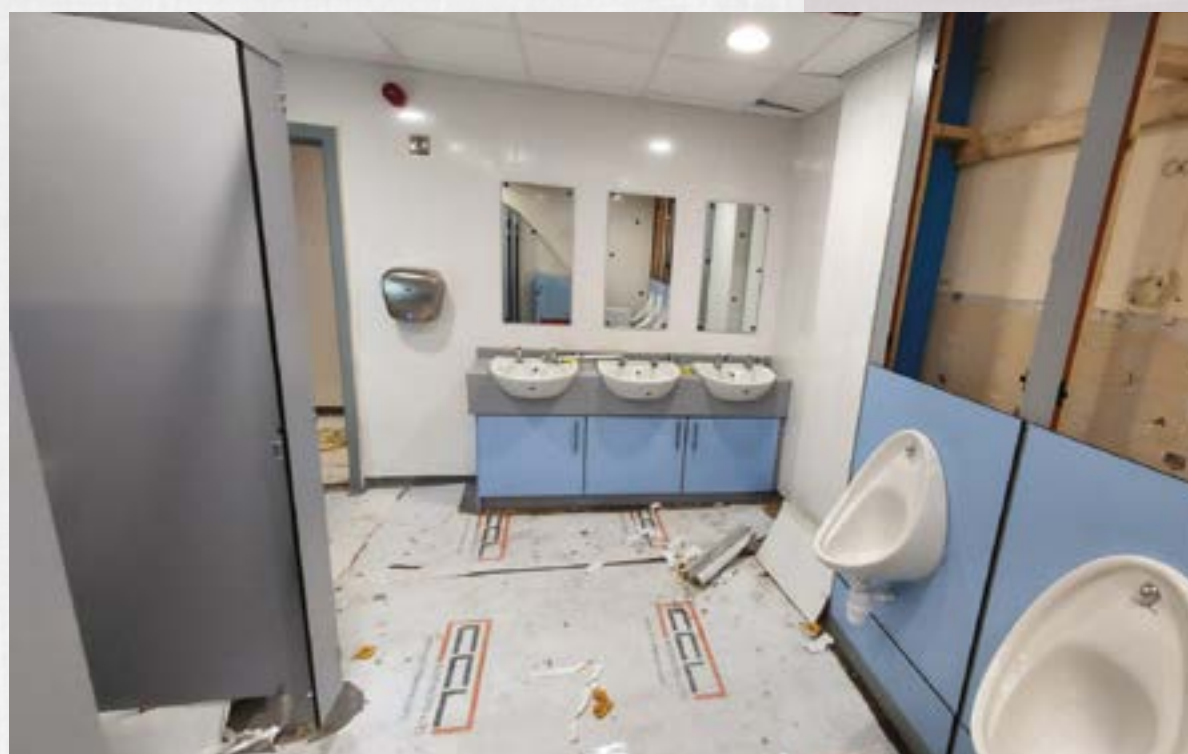
In addition, despite the impact of COVID restrictions, minor works remain on track, including new gym facilities at Ballymena and Bangor as well as new guard facilities at Queen's OTC. Other works include a proposed extension at Ballykinler Cadet Training Centre while Magilligan Cadet Training Centre has recently had an



updated heating system. Another exciting project on the horizon is a full internal refurbishment at Ballymoney Cadet Training Centre.

Abbotscroft bathrooms before refit

Abbotscroft Reserve Centre; this much needed refurbishment project is due for handover later this month.



PATHWAY ADVENTURE ACTIVITIES

Whilst COVID restrictions effectively cancelled the residential activity which

we had expected to deliver this autumn, we have responded with an increase in the number of day activities planned and delivered by Pathways.

Since the pandemic guidance instructions which came into effect on May 24 2021 allowing partial recommencement of activities within prescribed guidelines our proactive approach has led to the delivery of almost 18,000 young peoples' places. Included in these were interactions with 197 different organisations (schools, community and youth groups etc) which bodes well for the future as we begin our gradual return to a degree of normality prior to the onset of Winter. There have been very few days since activities recommenced in May when we have failed to deliver at least one event.

An important additional element which is, as of October 2021, is being delivered to schools via Pathways is The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. Following extensive discussions with schools across Northern Ireland we will deliver 365 Bronze Award and 75 Gold Awards scheme programmes for one school in Ballymena. That initial project has now started with the balance of the DoE programmes for that school (preparation for 400 Bronze awards and 40 Gold Awards) due for delivery in the Financial Year 2022-23 400.

A further nine schools are already at an advanced stage of discussion with Pathways on the delivery of their Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme training this year and next. Already take up seems likely to exceed our initial estimate of projected early stage interest of eight schools bringing forward 300 students.

Our successful interactions with Primary Schools has led to the delivery, again since May 2021, of the 'Mini-Medics' Programme to 500 children aged between 8-11 years of age, with each receiving a CPR and basic first-aid qualification. The unfortunate heart attack experienced by Danish footballer Christian Erikson in



the Euros has led to renewed calls for such training to be undertaken in schools and we have been well positioned to respond quickly and effectively with excellent training which has been tried and tested over three years of 'Mini Medica'. Invariably the programme receives a resounding welcome and endorsement from schools which have received the training.

Pathways has also delivered five Open College



Networks (OCN) programmes with r two twelve-month programmes delivered to Crumlin Integrated College and Priory Integrated College.

The forecast for what promises to be a busy New Year begins with full bookings for every weekend from Feb 22 until the end of June 2022, with additional delivery of more Duke of Edinburgh Awards preparation, and a vast array of one-day activities across the full

range of educational, community and third sector organisations throughout the remainder of the year.



VETERANS

An intensely busy period for The Northern Ireland Veterans' Support Office (NIVSO) began with the appointment of two new full time staff: Fiona Sinclair as Deputy Head and Janette Loughlin as Communications Officer, to be joined in early 2021 by Charlie Marno Northern Ireland Regional Co-ordinator Defence Garden Scheme and subsequently by Adam Elliott, working for Defence Medical Welfare Services in collaboration with NIVSO, assisting veterans and families leaving the services.

The formation of this new team under the direction of Liz Brown led to a significantly expanded reach for the NIVSO whose communication with the veteran community has increased exponentially through creative use of digital media.

Noteworthy examples of activity over the reporting period include the instigation of a Northern Ireland Veterans Mental Health Committee co-chaired by Chief Executive, RFCA and Danny Kinahan, the NI Veterans Commissioner and attended by all the key Veterans Mental Health delivery organisations. Amongst tangible early outputs were a Veterans Mental Health guide and associated information flyers accessible through the NIVSO website and widely distributed in hard copy and poster form.

The work of this valuable local committee links closely with the wider work of the UK's Contact group – a collaboration of military mental health policy makers, deliverers and researchers. NIVSO was privileged to co-host the National Contact Conference in March which focussed on veterans mental health delivery here in NI.

NIVSO continues to facilitate the drawdown of charitable monies from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust for capacity building and additional delivery of veterans services and activities across Northern Ireland. Over the course of the last year locally based organisations received funding to deliver a wide range of additional programmes, specifically aimed at tackling loneliness and social isolation as well as supporting a major suicide awareness programme called 'You Matter'.

NIVSO is leading a major new portfolio bid for additional Health and Wellbeing monies intended to create safe spaces, clearer pathways and provide trained volunteers within the wider veteran support network. Extensive consultation with the veteran community was conducted prior to submitting the bid and proved invaluable in shaping its projected programme activity.

More recently, NIVSO facilitated the Northern Ireland

leg of 'Routes of Remembrance', the poignant and unique event which takes wreaths and tributes and to significant location in the UK and overseas, as The Veterans Charity honours and remembers those who have fallen as a result of serving in the Armed Forces.

The wreath was received at Belfast City Airport having arrived courtesy of Logan Air from the Outer Hebrides. Remembrance events, hosted by a wide range of organisations, were held at Harland & Wolff shipyard, Scrabo Tower, Belfast City Hall, Londonderry Peace Bridge and Slieve Donard, amongst many other locations. The entire NI Veteran support network embraced this novel and moving Act of Remembrance in fine style.

The NIVSO website and its regularly updated social presence on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram carry news on activities and events for the veteran community here in NI. A new more interactive website has been commissioned and is coming soon.

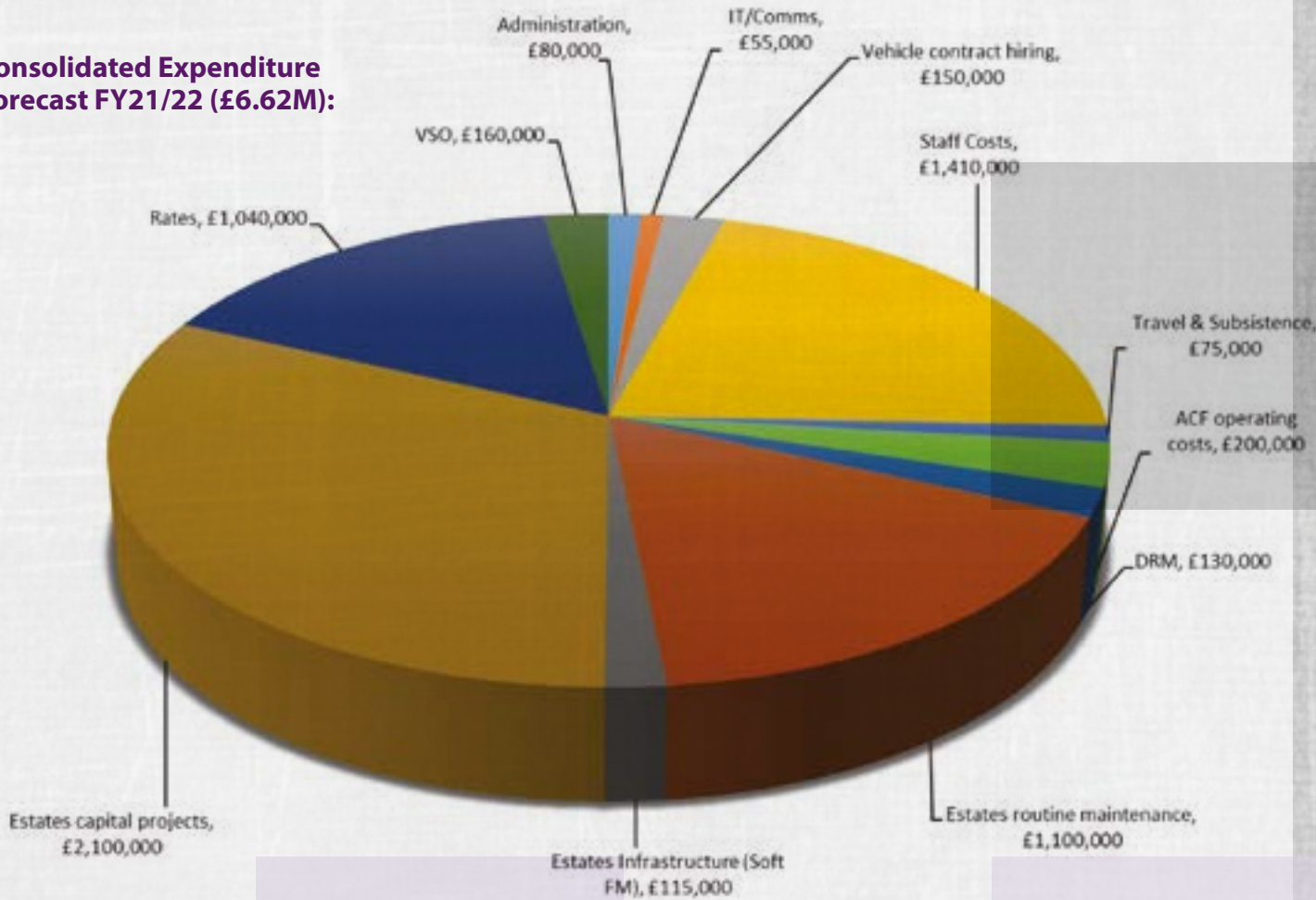


FINANCE

Expenditure of £6.62M is forecast for this Financial Year. The RFCA NI Budget Allocation for FY21/22 was as requested but, in light of the prolonged nature of COVID restrictions on certain activities such as ACF Annual Camps, Defence/Employer Engagement and travel, proved more than required in a number of area. However additional monies will be forthcoming for major Estates Projects in the near future (currently in the order of £2.15M), with the possibility of more to come before FY end.

Regionally Generated Income (RGI) was severely impacted by COVID restrictions in FY20/21, but is now picking up momentum in this FY in light of the activities delivered by Pathways in support of schools and young people, in parallel with the lifting of certain COVID restrictions.

Consolidated Expenditure Forecast FY21/22 (£6.62M):



HUMAN RESOURCES AND IT

The 'Cascade' HR system has been operational nationally for just over a year and, while it is streamlining the RFCA's HR processes and introducing tighter control measures, staff workload has been particularly high in most areas over the past 12 months with no indication that this will change going forward, with an increasing number of tasks on the horizon and no headroom available for increased staffing.

provided through the national (pan-RFCAs) Fujitsu IT contract.

To subscribe, visit our website at: www.reservesandcadetsni.org.uk
Find us on social media:
RFCA NI



The IT budget was significantly reduced this year which led to the termination of our long-standing IT maintenance contract. The IT maintenance is now managed by our own staff and by the Helpdesk



RFCA
Northern Ireland



Tel: 028 9521 9818
Freephone: 0800 730730

www.reservesandcadetsni.org.uk

Find us on social media:

RFCA NI

