

**Report from 356 (Felixstowe) Squadron, Air Training Corps  
26<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

Thanks very much for your email below. Felixstowe Air Cadets have no great need for assistance with IT/basic computer skills. However, as requested, here is our input to our local councillors' understanding of the use of online technology by community groups, clubs and organisations.

Apologies for the delay in getting back to you but today is quite appropriate for my reply as it is 'Cadet Day' within Armed Forces Week. I also copy in my counterparts David and Jennie with Felixstowe's Army and Sea Cadets, as well as Darren Aitchison of our Royal British Legion branch as I am very conscious that COVID-19 has reduced our customary level of contact.

All RAF Air Cadet (RAFAC) face-to-face activities (F2FA) were suspended nationwide with effect from Tuesday 17 March 2020 and we have been advised that this will likely remain in force until the end of August (although it will be interesting to see if that changes any with HMG's relaxation of its rules that is currently underway). The strength of the ban is such that we are not even allowed to enter our building to check on its condition (and it is still in a state of some disarray as we were in the midst of a major refurbishment just before lock-down was imposed).

This has been very frustrating as we have not been able to participate in such public events as Joan Rich's 102 laps of Allenby Park and the current Armed Forces Week on anything except a personal basis in civilian clothing. However, we did manage to participate in the VE Day 75 commemorations from our own homes. Also, we are now encouraging our cadets to get engaged with litter picking on an individual basis as part of our community engagement; this is being led by two stalwarts of Litter-Free Felixstowe and other community initiatives - Mrs Sue Lewis and Miss Michelle Smith.

Throughout, we have been carrying on with 'virtual' activities. Our first and only 'Virtual Parade Night' (VPN) on Facebook was conducted on Monday 23 March as the IT team at HQ RAFAC very quickly rolled out the Microsoft Teams application to the Corps and we conducted our first VPN using MS Teams on the following Monday. (MS Teams appears to be the online conferencing/training application of choice for many businesses as it is reportedly more secure than Zoom and has thus been adopted by RAFAC to ensure best practicable safeguarding).

We are now in a rhythm of a weekly Wednesday VPN on MS Teams with the focus being on light, fun activities such as scavenger hunts, quizzes, guest speakers, etc and we are averaging cadet attendance in the low to mid 20s from the mid-30s we have on the books. We are now adding in other evenings to begin picking up the backlog of training activity.

So, how do I sum up the experience of online Squadron activities during lockdown? Very early on during

the suspension of F2F activities the situation was looked at in thirds across RAFAC, i.e. a third of squadrons were actively engaged with virtual working, a third were not and the other third were somewhere in the middle. That kind of assessment could be brought down to a local level as follows (although things have progressively improved):

- One third of cadets are actively engaged, one third are not and the other third are somewhere in the middle, and those ratios appear to be echoed amongst adult staff.
- Yet the number of staff required to run a multi-activity Virtual Parade Night (VPN) is double that for an F2F parade night.
- Plus, the time required to plan, prepare, brief, rehearse, execute and debrief for virtual activities is proving to be at least double that for F2F.
- And the rate of change of policy for a wide range of RAFAC (non-F2F) activities has very much accelerated.

So, I hope that the above meets your request.

We are very much looking forward to an early but tightly risk-managed return to F2FA, but are still anticipating that our annual recruiting campaign for an Autumn intake of Year 8s and 9s will be virtual - either partially or wholly.

We are ever grateful for the past support that has been provided to Felixstowe Air Cadets by our local councillors and look forward to being able to increasingly re-engage F2F with our community.

May I also take this opportunity to introduce our new Squadron Chairperson - Miss Annette Cook - who I know will also be taking a proactive approach to community engagement by Felixstowe Air Cadets.

Kind regards

*Kim Balshaw*

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