



Polaris take over

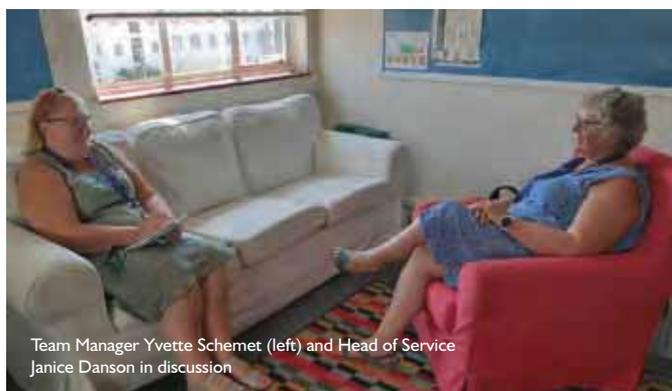
– but it's business as usual

Social work and welfare services for the British Forces Cyprus community is under new management as of 1 July this year – but don't expect to see too much in the way of change, writes Business Support Manager Claire Thomas.

In December 2019, the Ministry of Defence announced the service would be transferred to Polaris Children's Services, formerly Core Assets, from the previous provider, SSAFA.

With the new contractual arrangement kicking in during the summer, the service is now known as British Forces Social Work Service (BFSWS) and Community Support Cyprus.

For individuals and families who use the service, the key message is 'business as usual', with the current social work and support services in Cyprus still available, through the same qualified and experienced staff.



Team Manager Yvette Schemet (left) and Head of Service Janice Danson in discussion

Polaris is keen to emphasise the only changes to the service will be in the name, and Nick McPartlan, from the organisation, said: "We will build on its current strengths and ensure we are providing the best support to the community, which will include further development of early intervention agenda that enables individuals and families, within the military community, to get the right help at the earliest possible opportunity."

British Forces Cyprus' Wing Commander Marcus Collinge, from the Headquarters J1 Branch, said the future was looking very positive: "BFC is delighted to be working with Polaris Children's Services, who started providing the Social Work Services Contract on Island from July 1.

"Despite the considerable constraints which Covid-19 placed on the contract go-live date, both BFC and Polaris worked extremely hard to ensure that there was a seamless transition between SSAFA and Polaris.

"Polaris have already provided social work services provision for UK Armed Forces personnel in Germany and across the world.



Senior Social Work Practitioner Pamela Woodhouse discussing the use of resilience rocks with Peter Strange, a Personal Family Support Worker

EUROPE – WITHOUT THE BULL

A new website has been launched by the European Joint Support Unit (EJSU) which will become a single information gateway to serving in Europe for Service personnel, their families and civil servants based in Europe, from Portugal to Turkey.

The site – <https://www.EJSU.net> – was given a ‘soft’ launch at the end of the summer, with the first phase covering the ‘arriving’ and ‘living’ Overseas part.

Under each of the National Support Elements (NSEs), the Community Liaison Officers have created information packs about their primary sites, providing greater depth to the iHive Overseas Location Guides which they are designed to complement.

These ‘packs’ act as guidance into the NSE for accurate information – defunct websites often carry incorrect data, and individuals can share misleading information on social media platforms such as Facebook.

Existing in tandem, the website creators have replicated elements of the page on Defence Gateway to deliver the information on ‘serving’ Overseas, which carries a security caveat.

Routine orders, policy changes and pertinent information to Covid-19, Brexit and Future Healthcare Europe are all hosted there; all Service personnel have access to this through their Defence Gateway account, and families are equally entitled to accounts linked to their serving spouse – support from families is encouraged to ensure they get maximum benefit from the system.

Single Service HR organisations have been producing their own information packs about some overseas locations, which can cause grief for local liaison officers, who have to correct false expectations or misunderstandings because of wrong or outdated information.

The Community Liaison Officer (CLO) network will review information, which is aimed predominantly at families, to ensure it remains up-to-date and relevant.

The EJSU, whose mission is “to provide firm base support to Service personnel, civilians and their families serving with NATO, the EU and elsewhere in Europe and Turkey, in order to facilitate success on operations”, welcomes feedback to help develop the site.

The J6 team at EJSU are lead for the project and can be contacted at EJSU-J6-iHub-Mailbox@mod.gov.uk

The project is in its initial set-up phase and subsequent work foresees a full digitisation and signposting of the arrivals process, development of partner organisations ‘presence’ and interaction on the site (including Defence Infrastructure Organisation, Directorate of Children and Young People and the medical provision).

Through the Defence Gateway portal, families will be guided onto additional direction regarding the routine orders supporting the provision of their support Overseas and further mitigates the current lack of access to MODNet assets across communities in Europe.



ABOVE: (Socially distanced) photo of HQ BFC J1 and BFSWS personnel, from left to right: Wg Cdr Marcus Collinge SO1 J1, Maj Stephen Bond SO2 J1, Janice Danson BFSWS Head of Service Cyprus, Nick McPartlan Head of Services, Polaris Children's Service.



A set of resilience rocks, one tool used by the social workers when undertaking direct work with young people

“We look forward to working together to nurture a close relationship over the next four years.

“Please note however, that SSAFA will still be on island, providing the Community Healthcare Contract.”

Janice Danson, BFSWS Head of Service Cyprus, added: “We are

very pleased with how the transition has gone and we will continue to review our services to ensure we are providing the best service to our military community.”

For further information about the BFSWS Cyprus service and contact details, see their website <https://www.forcessocialwork.com/> If you have any questions regarding the service please email contactuscypirus@forcessocialwork.com

