



RAF ASSOCIATION
STRATEGY
2018 - 2030



Patron: Her Majesty The Queen
Registered Charity 226686 (England & Wales).
SC037673 (Scotland).

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Introduction

As our nation continues its 100th commemoration of the First World War we remember that, in the final year of that conflict, the Royal Air Force (RAF) was formed on 1 April 1918 through the amalgamation of the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service.

The centenary of the RAF is also the 87th anniversary of the formation of the Comrades of the RAF, which in 1943 changed to its present title of the Royal Air Forces Association (the Association).

Our task is to ensure that the centenary of the RAF is not just a single moment in time, a never-to-be-repeated high water mark, but instead is the catalyst for us to develop a stronger, more resilient and relevant Association that delivers its charitable aims to the RAF family.

The size, shape and needs of the RAF family are evolving and will continue to change in the future. With this in mind, this strategy will look forward to the centenary of the Association in 2030, setting the Association's intent, direction of travel and context within which we will operate.





Background

This document builds upon the 'Way Forward', which was endorsed by the Association's Annual Conference in 2014. It sets out our strategy for the next decade and beyond, what it means for the Association, the way we conduct ourselves, and the responsibilities that we carry.

There has never been a better time to make a significant contribution to the RAF family, nor a brighter light to shine on our ambition. We should focus and capitalise on the new opportunities presented both by societal changes and by RAF100.

Our efforts since 2014 have focussed on transforming the Association into an organisation that is able to support the RAF family for decades beyond its centenary.

As the RAF family's membership organisation, with responsibilities in both the UK and internationally, and through our broader purposes as a welfare charity, we remain fully committed to our prime strategic priority of providing lifelong support to those who serve, or have served, in our air forces and their families. This continues to be the ultimate goal of all our activities.

In achieving this goal, we are uniquely positioned to use our membership and wider supporter base to drive positive outcomes more widely than ever before through our actions and influence.

Successfully delivering lifelong support to the RAF family will require absolute clarity of vision, mission and purpose. It will demand an organisation structured and resourced to deliver; it must also be relevant and credible to all stakeholders.

More than anything else, our Association will need the insight and confidence to state clearly where we believe we should be leading activity, where we can support or advocate it, and where we should leave responsibility to others.

This document outlines the strategic priorities we must act on in the best interests of our membership and beneficiaries. It summarises the culture and values we must embody, how our structure and governance must evolve, and the vital nature of the relationships and partnerships.

Working together, we can ensure our members remain proud of belonging to our Association and transform the lives of those we support.

Putting the challenge in context

In 2014, the RAF family stood at around 1.56 million people (or 2.4 per cent of the UK population), comprising serving RAF personnel, veterans and their dependants. By 2030, the RAF family is forecast to reduce to around one million people (or 1.5 per cent of the UK population).

For the purposes of this strategy, the Association will consider this reduced figure to be the 'steady state' of the RAF family. It should be noted however, that even with this reduction, the RAF family will continue to include a large number of WWII and national service veterans throughout the period.

Over recent years the RAF has reduced in number to its current size of around 32,000. However, a commensurate reduction in demand for welfare support is unlikely in the near future.

The high tempo of operations and the changing nature of the RAF family are generating new and different requirements that we will need to meet for many years to come. Irrespective of the size of the RAF family, it will continue to have significant welfare needs that the Association is committed to support.

The Association has seen the demand for welfare casework grow since 2014 by 46 per cent, reflecting an increase in the number of softer welfare needs.

Alongside this, the complexity of cases has also increased. Increased legislation and regulation, reduced government budgets and an increase in working age poverty are having an impact on the nature of the welfare demands that the Association is facing. In order to respond to all these needs, the Association is seeking innovative solutions, including the provision of welfare support services in partnership with other charities.

According to our own research, as well as that carried out by the RAF Benevolent Fund, the key issues facing the RAF family are:

- Social care
- Mobility
- Social isolation
- Relationships
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Financial support
- Respite and supported breaks

Every year, the Association addresses all these issues through the welfare support services it provides for over 66,000 RAF veterans and their families. Through its work on stations and units, the Association also helps in excess of 50,000 serving RAF personnel and their families, with many thousands more also benefiting from wide-ranging investment.

Until recently, the Association was reducing in size. However, a proactive recruitment campaign focussing upon serving and veteran personnel and their families has reversed the decline.

Since 2014, over 25,000 new members have joined the Association, bringing the current membership to approximately 72,000. We are committed to achieving a sustainable membership of 100,000. Achieving our membership ambitions requires engagement with serving RAF personnel; they are the current and future stakeholders of the Association – as its members, donors, supporters and beneficiaries. We will find innovative ways to engage with serving men and women both to meet their needs and to raise the profile and resources required to support those who have served before them.

Our fundraising activities face a number of challenges. The newly introduced fundraising regulations and the upcoming General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) have significantly affected the ways in which the Association can recruit and maintain engagement with members, donors and supporters.

While the public's trust in charities has begun to recover, critical coverage in the media is likely to continue. The reducing size of the RAF family has also caused a smaller pool of potential members, supporters and donors.

Increased regulation and scrutiny of the actions of charities is not only limited to fundraising, but is also becoming prevalent more widely throughout all their activities.



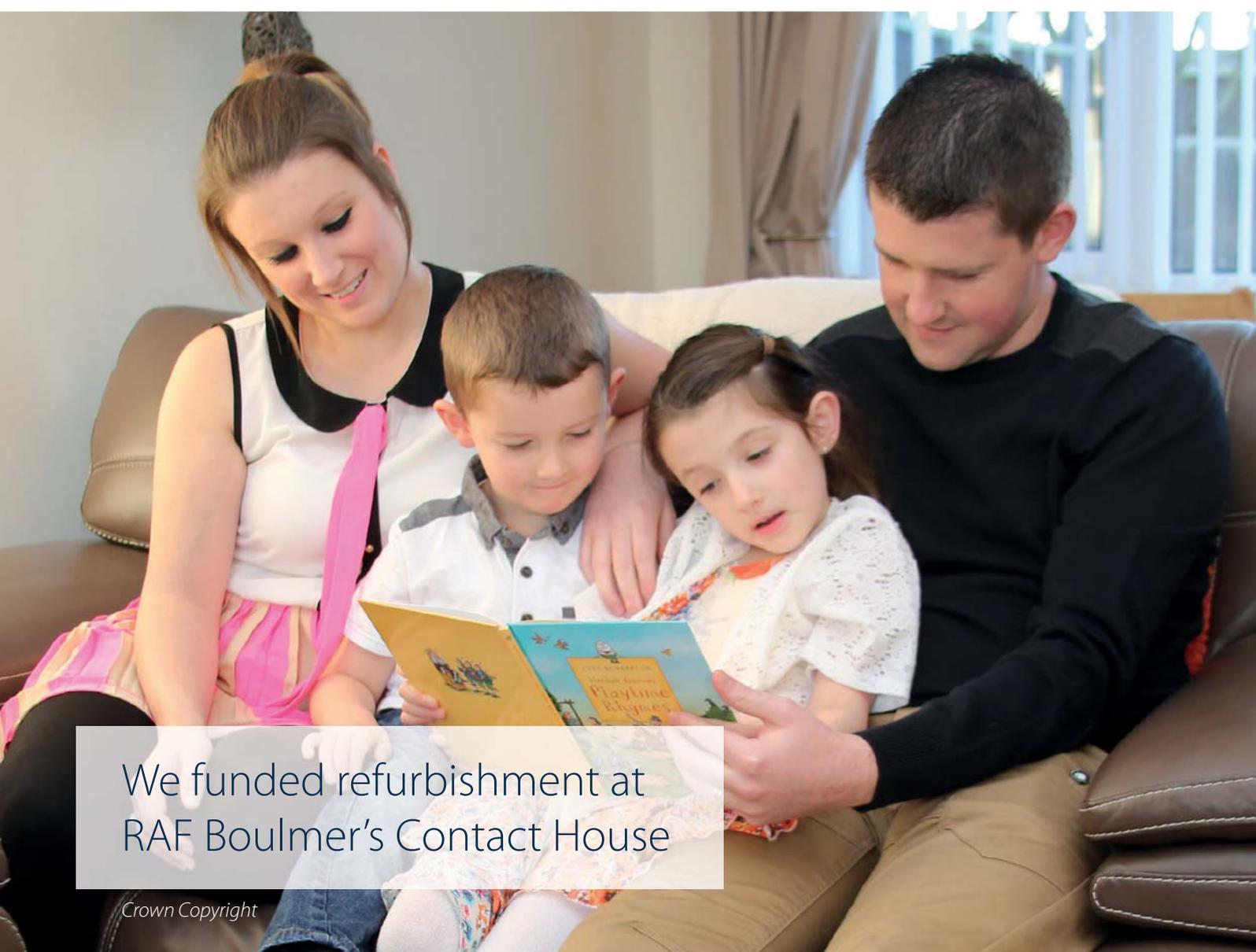
This is to be welcomed as it will increase the transparency and effectiveness of the charity sector. However the resulting additional demands imposed on the Association to ensure compliance are significant.

The Association has over 350 linked charities within our branch structure. While we have taken important steps in preparation for upcoming regulatory and legislative changes, we cannot underestimate the task of ensuring we have the rigorous governance in place that is rightly expected of us.

This has to be a team effort. Our headquarters and areas will support branches to navigate the changes, undertake the necessary actions and to instil a governed well ethos into their everyday operating activities.

Wherever possible, we will balance compliance with practicality, while continuing to develop our governance structures and the information and guidance provided to branches. Without making these changes, the Association will not be able to continue as a leading provider of welfare services to the RAF family.

The Association's good reputation is a priceless asset. The delivery of its membership, welfare and fundraising activities depend on this. We will continuously measure the impact and effectiveness of the Association's activities through independent market research and through ensuring that our behaviours match our values.



We funded refurbishment at
RAF Boulmer's Contact House

Our vision and mission

“The object for which the Association is established is to promote, through the comradeship engendered by its members, the welfare by charitable means of all serving and former members of Our Air Forces, their spouses and dependants, together with the widows and widowers and dependants of those who died whilst serving or subsequently.”

Our vision

“...to ensure that their sacrifice does not result in suffering, poverty or loneliness...”

This vision is driven by the Association’s belief that, through the inspiration and power of its members, supporters (volunteers and donors) and employees, change can be achieved in the perceptions of society as a whole and how people individually think, feel and behave towards ‘Our Air Forces’ personnel and their families.

Our mission

“...to promote, through the comradeship engendered by its members, the welfare by charitable means of the RAF family”

The mission defines our purpose as an organisation. It describes our ambition and the contribution our members, volunteers, supporters, beneficiaries and employees can actively make to achieve our vision. It seeks to define what will drive our strategic themes, our focus and our resources over the next decade and more.

Our culture and values

Our primary strategic objective is to ensure that our members and all those who serve or have served in 'Our Air Forces' (and their families) receive lifelong support.

We believe that support for individuals is key. Our approach will therefore always be member and beneficiary-centred, concentrating effort and resources where we think we can make the most significant difference. This approach will apply to all of our activities.

We will continue to structure the Association to achieve our ambitions and employ or engage with people that are driven by excellence, have a belief in the highest standards, and the motivation to constantly improve.

We will display passion for everything we do and an ambition to achieve the most we can, knowing that together we can make a real difference in people's lives.

The Association is an organisation with unique responsibilities and roles. However, we will only achieve our ambitions by working with and through others, and by understanding where we fit within the wider RAF and military charity landscape.

Collaboration and cooperation does, and will continue to, improve beneficiary experience, member and supporter understanding and avoid confusion and competition in an increasingly crowded sector. The Association believes that, in the longer-term future, one single RAF charity would best meet the needs of the RAF family.

To secure the mandate we need to maximise momentum, we must inspire confidence, trust and respect from all our partners, including the RAF and MOD, other charities (military and civilian), corporate and academic institutions. We are therefore committed to a culture of openness, integrity and honesty. We also recognise that we cannot achieve all our ambitions in isolation.

We are a membership association and we have not only a desire, but also a responsibility to work in partnership with suitable organisations who can assist us in achieving our aims more effectively and efficiently.

We must work hard to obtain and then keep our mandate to act in the way we believe is best for the Association and our members. All of which is reflected in our values – values that go beyond our commitment to excellence to include the openness, integrity and honesty of our approach and the respect and trust we have for others.

Most of all we must keep our members and beneficiaries at the heart of everything we do. If we lose that focus, we lose our purpose.

We are guided in our member and beneficiary-centred behaviour by three prime organisational values:

Commitment to excellence

Everything we do must be of the highest standard, reflective of our ambition to be best prepared to support the RAF family, and to be leaders in our sector.

Honesty and openness

We will proactively engage with and listen to our members, beneficiaries, supporters, employees and partners, seeking opinion and cultivating understanding of our ambitions and approach.

Respect and trust

All our interactions (whether with members, beneficiaries, supporters, employees, partners or the wider community) will be characterised by a respect for the views of others and the integrity of our approach. We will treat all people and issues with fairness and equality at all times.



We helped Rob and Ellie Lee through times of financial hardship and gave them a break when they needed it most



We helped Albert Pemberton-Sheen to finally receive his Second World War medals

Strategic planning

The Association adopted six strategic themes in 2014, which we review annually. These themes remain just as relevant as we look towards 2030. Importantly, they determine the activities necessary to achieve our vision and mission. The themes are considered complementary to each other rather than ranking in any order.

Engagement in the wider community: supporting and encouraging our members and other stakeholders to play an integral role in the communities in which they live and work

Strengthening our membership: better serving and supporting our members, beneficiaries and the wider RAF family

Creating a better perception: inspiring the passion of our members and stimulating effective support for the RAF family within the wider public

Financial sustainability: ensuring we can fund services not just through to 2030 but beyond

Representation of the membership: influencing on behalf of our members and beneficiaries

Organisational resilience: ensuring that our governance structures are up-to-date, fit-for-purpose and compliant – practically and legally

Medium-term financial planning is vital to our overall strategy. This will reassure members, supporters and beneficiaries about how the Association intends to generate and deploy its financial resources to meet the needs of the RAF family today and in the future.

We must understand the financial demands of meeting our members and beneficiaries' needs in order to ensure the long-term financial viability of the Association.

We anticipate that income from traditional sources of revenues will remain stable. To this end, we will invest further in these and other areas of income generation to ensure our long-term financial stability.

This will mean that we will be agile in our response to new opportunities, looking at and testing new, non-traditional sources of income generation to add to the revenues from our traditional sources.

Continually improving the perception of the Association amongst the RAF family, our beneficiaries and potential supporters is a key priority. It is a vital component to raise the income we require to deliver our membership and welfare objectives.

We will grow our income generation capacity to meet these objectives.

Our ambition is that every member of the RAF family will know about the Association and its single point of contact to avoid any potential confusion when accessing help and support. Our area-based structure of branch support officers and welfare managers provides a unique opportunity to provide local delivery across our international footprint.



Conclusion

This programme takes the Association towards 2030 with a clearly defined vision and mission that successfully frames our wider charitable objectives around our primary purpose as an organisation. It links an ambitious vision to clear outcomes:

- i. Six strategic themes that focus on our primary role of delivering a wide range of important benefits to our members and beneficiaries and our ability to influence and engage at a national level. These themes will remain constant over the period.
- ii. Ambitious strategic objectives (expressing our six themes), which are likely to evolve over the period.
- iii. The “how” and “what” of the delivery of these objectives, documented in the Operational Plan that is annually reviewed and approved by Council.

The Association will continue to look to engage and collaborate with other charities (especially the RAF Benevolent Fund) and partner organisations wherever possible, in order to increase effectiveness and efficiency.

We will therefore differentiate between those areas in which we are mandated to deliver; those where we can lead activity for the good of the wider RAF family; and those where our influence and our profile as an organisation (our brand) can help facilitate the activity and ambitions of our closest partners, such as the RAF Benevolent Fund.

All this will happen against a background of our continuing organisational transformation; a process of improvement within the Association that will build upon its illustrious past and ensure it is best placed to succeed in the future.

Together, we will ensure that our Association is well-placed as it approaches its own centenary to support the next 100 years of the RAF family.



Jonette MacDonald and
Ruth Birch at Wings Break hotel,
Rothbury House

Strategic themes

Creating a better perception

- Increase recognition and understanding of the range of our support to the RAF family
- Generate respect for what we do
- Communicate clearly and achieve a clear, distinctive brand
- Integrate all our communications and marketing activity
- Communicate using the most effective methods
- Gather and maintain excellent data
- Measure perception of our brand

Financial sustainability

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Engaging with the wider community

- Build on our strengths and our members' passion
- Extend our reach further into our communities
- Support our branches and clubs
- Build our networks
- Develop our influence
- Give a compelling reason to join, support or engage with the Association
- Recognise our differences

Organisational resilience

- Strengthen volunteer and employee structures
- Build the skills of both employees and volunteers
- Be an attractive employer
- Have the appropriate resources in place to achieve our goals
- Ensure our governance structures are up to date and compliant – practically and legally
- Make best use of collaboration in all that we do

Strengthening our membership

- Enable support to the evolving wider RAF family
- Increase support to serving RAF personnel
- Respond to the growing RAF Reserve and the implications of the new employment model
- Move to needs-led provision
- Innovate product development, services and delivery
- Provide a personalised client approach
- Be passionate about and ambitious for our beneficiaries
- Increase our volunteer workforce
- Evidence the impact of our work
- Collaborate and integrate, where appropriate with the RAF Benevolent Fund

Representation of the RAF family

- Take a lead role in representing the RAF family
- Influence credibly and intelligently on behalf of our members, beneficiaries and employees
- Engage with government and other decision making bodies to promote the RAF family and the Association
- Manage the Families Federation for mutual improvement of influence and stature
- Step up publicly as the largest single service organisation

Strategic objectives

Sustain membership at **100,000 members**

Champion the interests of our **members, beneficiaries and sector** as a whole

Maintain income at a minimum of **£15 million per annum** in a diverse and sustainable manner which meets service needs and ensures financial stability

Consolidate the Association's position as a leading provider of **welfare services** to the RAF family to improve the lives of beneficiaries

Remain an organisation recognised for **excellence, achievement and responsibility**



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