



EAST OF ENGLAND VETERANS ADVISORY AND PENSIONS COMMITTEE
(EVAPC)
MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD ON 22 SEPTEMBER 2016 AT THE ARMY
CADET HEADQUARTERS, WATERBEACH, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Present: Mr JL Jelley – Chairman
Mrs K Green
Lt Cdr D Mincher
Maj T Ormiston
Mrs D Preston
Mr I Stewart
Lt Col R E Toland (Secretary)

Apologies: Mr J Barnard
Mr T Heslin
Mrs D Preston
Lt Col P Robinson

Absent: Mr M Berry
Dr IM Calder

Action

ITEM 1 - Welcome and Declarations of Interest

1. The meeting was opened at 10:30 by the Chairman. The Chairman welcomed to the meeting the following guests.

Ms Sharon Taebert – Acting D/Head of Veterans UK
Mr Martin Goudie - VWS Strategic Business Lead
Mr Stuart Burgess – VWS Welfare Manager

Also in attendance observing proceedings, was Ms Sue Brenchley, a potential member of the committee.

2. There were no declarations of interest.

ITEM 2 – Minutes of the Meeting Held on 23 June 2016

3. **Approval of Minutes.** The Minutes, circulated to members prior to the meeting, were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

4. **Matters Arising.** There were no matters arising.

ITEM 3 – Chairman’s Update

5. The Chairman briefed the committee on the position regarding engagement with the various covenant boards across the East of England. Entrées had been made into Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk and efforts continued to engage with Essex, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire. Mr Goudie commented that in his experience the effectiveness of covenant boards around the country was extremely variable. He regarded VAPC involvement with boards to be of great importance. The Chairman said that in conversation with the Minister, he had suggested that VAPCs should be the Minister’s “eyes and ears” on the ground; a suggestion endorsed by the Minister. Mrs K Green recounted her experiences when attending covenant board meetings in her RBL role; again a very mixed performance picture was apparent across the region. .

ITEM 4 – Strategic Plan

6. Commenting on the Strategic Plan the Chairman noted that a phased approach would be necessary and the first steps would be to establish links with all covenant boards in the East. It was queried whether the strategic plan had been “cleared” with Veterans UK. The Chairman observed that this was not necessary as VAPCs were of course independent entities answerable directly to the Minister. Mr Goudie said he would be prepared to attend covenant board meetings to provide a technical input where necessary, but cautioned that he would need ample notice.

ITEM 5 – Membership and Recruitment

7. In opening this item, the Chairman observed that with current member numbers, we lacked the capacity to fulfil the aims and objectives set out in the strategic plan. In discussion it was agreed that the committee should be aiming to achieve a membership of twenty and that ideally new members should be from parts of the region currently unrepresented. There was a general discussion on the approaches to be adopted to recruit new members and there was a consensus that a combination of methods was needed: advertisements in the national and local press; use of social media; and networking by existing members to identify potential members. It was agreed that in view of the lengthy lead times for Veterans UK to run a formal recruitment campaign, the option of co-opt members should be considered. This would avoid potential recruits having to wait for selection boards to be convened.

Members

8. Ms Taebert commented that Veterans UK were in the process of preparing a recruitment advertisement and she agreed to table it at the VAPC Chairs’ meeting in Glasgow on 13 Oct 16 with a view to VAPCs adapting it for use locally.

Veterans
UK

9. Mr Goudie suggested that an approach to Mr Colin Black, the Manager of Project NOVA might be productive. Project Nova is a project that supports ex-Forces personnel who have entered police custody. The Chairman and Mr Goudie agreed to follow this up.

Chairman
Mr
Goudie

ITEM 6 – Succession Planning

10. In raising this matter the Chairman observed that, whilst he and the Deputy/Secretary were the only two appointed “officers” on the committee, should any other member wish to be considered for either role this would be pursued,

Members

ITEM 7 – Veterans UK Update

11. Ms Taebert gave a wide-ranging and comprehensive update on current Veterans UK business. A copy of her presentation is attached.

ITEM 8 – VWS Activity Report

12. Mr Burgess briefed the meeting on VWS activities over the past quarter. A copy of his presentation is attached.

ITEM 9 – Any Other Business

13. Maj Ormiston asked whether Veterans UK and VWS had had any involvement with Afghan interpreters who had been evacuated to the UK after the withdrawal from Afghanistan. Veterans UK agreed to check whether they had been involved in any capacity.

Veterans
UK

14. The Chairman noted that there had been some confusion as to the start time of meetings and ruled that all future meetings would begin at 1030 hrs.

ITEM 10 – Date of Next Meeting

15. The Secretary to consult members and arrange a date in January 2017.

Signed:

Chairman.....Date.....

Veterans UK Update to Eastern VAPC 22 Sep 2016

There is no doubt that this is a challenging, yet exciting time for veterans administration in the UK. Whilst we continue to ensure that our business as usual service is continually improved we are looking more widely at how we contribute to the wellbeing of Veterans in the wider UK.

Veterans Gateway

Funded with 2 million from LIBOR to create a portal for veterans using multi-media channels i.e. web based, 24 hr call centre and chat lines with software that could be used in pop-in centres. The portal will sit above all government and 3rd sector organisations to pull together the complex veterans space. It is anticipated that veterans will register to use the site and it may be possible to glean some information from this data. Intelligent software will be used so that input provokes relevant questions i.e. if a veteran has served for more than 5 years the system will ask if they have claimed preserved pension. The successful bid has to be self-funding within 2 years. A media package will be produced by central communications to support the government initiative.

Assessment boards were held on 28th July with successful companies. From these initial bids received, 3 groups have been chosen to further enhance details of the way in which their service will be provided. This detailed information is required by November 2016 when a final contract will be awarded.

Northern Ireland Aftercare Service & VWS

To continue to try and improve the service to veterans in this particularly challenging area of the UK there is a proposal that the NI Aftercare Service transition to DBS to work alongside Belfast and Dublin VWS officers and provide a whole Irish welfare provision for both NI and RoI. The project is in the initial scoping stages with an options paper to be agreed early in the new year. 38th Brigade are taking the lead in this with close support from myself and Vets UK.

VA&PC

In my new role I am slowly working my way round the Committees and learning about the issues you face and the work involved in the re-appointments of Chair and members. I am aware that you are keen to see the completion and publication of the Statutory Instrument to further clarify your roles and I am led to understand that it is the intention to have this document laid by year end. Ministerial agreement relating to the Triennial Review has, I believe just been issued and Rob has issued a letter to all Committees.

I have been impressed by the receipt of business strategies from a few of the Committee areas, your own included. This really shows the professionalism and value that the groups provide. I know that a lot of members also link into the numerous covenant and veterans/families issues ongoing in addition to VA & PC support which does much to enhance first hand knowledge and bring relevant information to colleagues. I have asked for a session on best practice to feature at the Chairman's conference and with your agreement I would like to include your strategy document.

I am looking forward to my first attendance at the Vets CAG on 29th September, closely followed by the Chairs Conference 13th October.

General

It is inspiring to understand and be part of the collaborative workings with statutory and voluntary services and charities. There is no doubt that the welfare of Veterans is a collegiate task. I believe Vets UK needs to ensure that we are at the forefront of emerging policy and developments as they occur.

The Schemes

AFCS average age of cases on hand YTD is 53.5 working days, a drop from 67.4 in 15/16.

WPS average age of cases on hand YTD is 108.9 working days, a drop from 121.15 for 15/16.

AFPS 75, AFPS05 and AFPS15 running smoothly.

VWS

The Veterans Welfare Service continues to provide nationwide coverage from its four Welfare Centres, with priority given to deaths in-service, deaths post-service, seriously injured leavers other medical discharges and those identified as having a potential welfare need on transition

By strengthening internal arrangements with AFCS, WPS, AFPS and CSC's Enquiry Centre they ensure proactive referrals to VWS are made where a need is perceived, in addition to those from our Veterans Helpline. The Veterans Welfare Service is seeing real results from surgeries and clinics and are looking at how they can further develop that service.

VWS links with the military in-Service business partners remains strong, with VWS Welfare Managers continuing to engage within PRU / PRC locations, Headley Court, Battle Back Centre and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham. This is in addition to the strong and important links VWS has with third sector business partners.

Helpline

The Veterans UK Helpline has continued to provide the first point of contact for Veterans, their Dependents and partnering organisations, relating to a wide range of queries relating to Veterans UK business and wider Veterans issues. Helpline has transferred to the Customer Services Pillar

Enhancements to the existing Helpline computer systems have been implemented which provides a robust solution to aide business continuity, streamlining of quick win calls to keep queues moving efficiently and improved Management Information. Currently the total call handle time has been reduced by 1 min 30 seconds and there is an ongoing exercise looking at an enhanced functionality known as 'Queue Busting' or 'Virtual Queuing'. This provides customers with an alternative to opt for an automatic call-back during periods of high demand. The service invites the customers to select a key on their keypad and when the next available Operator is free, the enhanced function automatically rings the customer back.

S Jabeart

27th Sept 16

Veterans Welfare Service report for VAPC meeting 22nd September 2016

Staffing

The Kidderminster office have now recruited a new Welfare Assistant and she is getting on very well with her training and will be spending sometime in Norcross this week. Amy Stanley who was on maternity leave has also returned to work on a part time basis; hopefully the VWC will be back to full strength shortly.

A new Welfare Manager has been appointed and is due to start work very soon, Jane Wright worked for the Army Welfare Service so has a good grounding for the post. The plan is for her to work out of Bramcote Barracks and to cover some of the West Midlands as well as Northamptonshire and North Cambridgeshire.

Casework

The on-going Mesothelioma work is still being treated as a priority and although not the heavy workload, as when the original announcement was made it is still quite busy. Because of the importance of this particular aspect of this area of work we have forged link with various asbestos support groups this link shows groups <http://www.asbestosforum.org.uk/forumMembers.asp#1>. We are still working with the Prison Service in Norwich Watton and at Hollesey Bay as well as the ongoing work alongside the MCTC at Colchester where a member of staff visits every week. We are continuing with attending the Bridge for Heroes centre at Kings Lynn on a monthly basis and regularly attend the Combat Stress Outreach Groups in Colchester Ipswich and Norwich as well as Britannia Barracks drop in centre in Norwich.

Events

We attended and gave two presentations at the SSAFA event in Daventry in June which was very well attended; we had a lot of enquiries on the day and some very good feedback after the event. We recently also attended the Royal Anglians Reunion Day at IWM Duxford again a very well attended event with several thousand veterans and their families. We had a lot of people coming to see us during the day and this had led to several follow up contacts since the event.

Other

As you may be aware there has been some media coverage recently about Valarium and in response to this issue on the 5th September the MoD launched a Mefloquine single point of contact helpline this will be available 9-5 Monday to Friday except bank holidays the number is 0306 7705059 and the e-mail address is SGDPHC-MEFLOQUINESPOC@mod.uk

The region will be representing Vets UK at the "Ride to the Wall" Event at the National Memorial Arboretum. This is one of the key events in their calendar. Previous experience indicates that veterans from all over the country will be in attendance. In the past we have provided Advice & Support to more veterans than on Armed Forces Day.