

Social Security Act 1989

North East Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committee

Minutes of meeting held on 25 September 2017 at Finchale Training College Durham

Present:	Mr P E Kingham (<i>Chairman</i>)	(PK)
	Mrs S Crosby	(SC)
	Mr A deCourtney-Wellum	(ACW)
	Mr B G de la Haye OBE	(BdH)
	Mr S Green	(SG)
	Mr L O'Halleron	(LO'H)
	Mr M Pears MBE	(MP)
	Mr M Potts	(MMP)
	Mr A J P Watson (<i>Secretary</i>)	(AW)
	Mr A Winnett	(TW)

Apologies:	Mr B Halfpenny
	Dr D Mayes
	Mr C Rushton
	Mr P Sinclair
	Mrs L Smith
	Mr A Heron VWS

Welcome and Introduction.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting (which commenced at 1000). There was first a presentation by Jim Khambatta of NHS England about the commissioning of medical services for veterans which lasted until 1130.

It was agreed that in the absence of any new direction, the meeting would be conducted under the rules and guidance previously pertaining to War Pensions Committees and the VAPC Members handbook.

Item		Action
228	Declarations of Interest	
228.1	The Chairman tabled the Statutory Instrument and reminded members that should anything be discussed at the meeting which might constitute a conflict of interest between their personal life and VAPC business, they are required to declare such interest and take no part in the item concerned.	

228.2	There were no Declarations of Financial or Pecuniary Interest.	
229	Confirmation of minutes	
229.1	The members confirmed the minutes of the meeting of 9 th June 2017, previously circulated, were a true record & they were then signed by PK.	
230	Matters Arising	
230.1	215 PK has still to obtain a copy of the 'e' library on a memory stick.	PK
230.2	220.4 It has been confirmed that there will be a recruiting campaign later in the year.	ALL
230.3	221.3 Northumbria University have advertised a national symposium on 16 November titled Shaping the Future to deliver their findings of a study of substance and alcohol misuse by veterans, access to treatment and the integration of health and social care. The day is sponsored by RBL and there will be a charge for delegates and any profit will go the ABF.	PK, BdH, AW

230.4	223 – Durham AFF report was circulated, the next Northumberland AFF will be held on 26th September and the NE Regional forum is 6 th October.	
230.5	224.3 – The Chair thanked MMP for publishing the Durham report to the web and encouraged members to send future 'news' items to MMP/AW promptly to help keep the site current.	ALL
231	Committee Annual Report	
231.1	The Chair thanked members for their contributions to the Committee report. The completed document was submitted to Veterans UK and circulated to members in advance of the meeting. The Chair took the opportunity to highlight the following points:	
231.2	Continuing to develop our role to support delivery of the AF Covenant.	
231.3	Ensuring that information is captured for future reports including support to individuals which is not necessarily known beyond the member who provided support. Clearly not all would feature in the narrative which would concentrate on trends and unusual cases where policy may not be clear but it would also be useful to develop some simple statistics.	ALL
231.4	Assisting with the update of the VAPC Handbook and introduction of TORs. Developing use of the Web.	
231.5		
232	Regional Welfare Services Report	

232.1	<p>WWS provided a written report with the following information.</p> <p>Numbers of VWS visits April to Aug 17:</p> <p>Alan Heron 143 Elizabeth Highmoor 65</p>	
232.2	<p><u>Welfare Targets</u> Year to date, the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for Welfare are both being met. These being, to visit all clients within 20 days of request (95% target – achieved 98.93%), and to visit all newly bereaved widows within 15 days (98% target – achieved 100%).</p>	
232.3	<p><u>VWS Training</u> Training provision continues to be closely monitored due to constraints with Travel + Subsistence spend and, where possible, local links are being fully utilised in order that training updates are delivered at minimal cost. Negotiations are currently in place with a view to securing DWP refresher training for all Welfare staff. Significant changes in the DWP world (introduction of Universal Credit) mean there is real emphasis on the need for delivery of this to staff.</p>	
232.4	<p><u>Mesothelioma</u> High priority mesothelioma cases continue to be referred to the organisation and Welfare have an active role to play in each and every case. We continue to action any new cases as a matter of priority; ensuring clients receive a call from us within 24hrs of notification and a subsequent visit within five working days. We also now have formal links in place with the 12 national asbestos support groups in that any clients they come across will be referred to us</p>	

	<p>immediately so we can engage to consider claim / compensation payment.</p>	
232.5	<p><u>Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS)</u> The current average clearance time for AFCS cases stands at 53.70 days. There are 3288 cases un cleared at present and the average age of these cases stands at 50.60 days.</p>	
232.6	<p><u>War Pensions Scheme (WPS)</u> The current average clearance time for WPS cases stands at 100.97 days. There are 6698 cases on hand at present and the average age of these un cleared cases stands at 94.50 days.</p>	
232.7	<p><u>Veterans Helpline</u> Year to date, calls received on the Helpline total 106,362. Average time to answer and deal with calls is 3 mins 16 seconds. E-mail correspondence received via the Helpline multiuser account total 25,851 year to date and, of these, 100% have been actioned within the 5 day target.</p>	
233	<p>Committee Remit and Objectives</p>	

233.1	There is now a sound basis on which to build future objectives and develop lines to take around current issues whilst briefing and dealing with LAs/AFFs.	PK LS
233.2	The committee was content to retain the objectives for 2017/2018 as involving not just raising awareness, but also health provision for veterans, identifying reality about homelessness for veterans in the NE, equality around disabled veterans travel concessions and resettlement provision for early service leavers.	
234	Homelessness project	
234.1	MP explained the information he had gathered suggested that there was no significant increase in the numbers of homeless or rough sleeping veterans.	
234.2	There had however been a spike in central Newcastle where the Police advised occasionally during the summer there might be a problem.	
234.3	Hostel spaces are available in Catterick, Sacriston, Avondale House Newcastle, Brims House Newcastle, Bibby House Gateshead & Middlesbrough for homeless veterans and some are known to have regular vacancies which suggests that there is no real problem.	
234.4	This suggested that there was no real problem.	
234.5	SG will ask the new outreach workers for information.	SG
234.6	ACW explained a new pilot programme was being established in his area and undertook to forward details.	ACW
234.7	MP pointed out the strong network of help available to quickly help a veteran who may present in those circumstances, where within weeks they can be back on their feet and possibly heading for employment.	
234.8	Our aim is to clarify the position regionally by Christmas.	
235	ESL Resettlement	
235.1	This issue has been elevated to VetsUK and will be looked at during the Chairs conference	PK
236	Transport Concessions for Disabled Veterans	

236.1	PK had looked into the situation across the NE and identified there was disparity between LA areas.	
236.2	DOT have provided clear guidelines detailing that persons in receipt of mobility allowances including PIP, AFIP, DLA and WPMS should qualify for a free local bus pass without requirement for further challenge or assessment. However not all of those who administer the concessions adhere to this guidance. It is suspected that Nexus who manage the service on behalf of NE local authorities believe that APiP superseded WPMS rather than them running in parallel for AFCS and the WPS and some war pensioners are being disadvantaged.	
236.3	Whilst London have for some years had a well-managed and publicised scheme for veterans which is run by TfL. It fully meets the guidelines and includes use of the Tube system and some over ground train services. There are however are clear disparities and disadvantage in other regions. PK has asked for an item on the agenda for the Chairs conference in October to explain the issue and gain support from other chairs to establish the reality in their areas with a view to promoting compliance with DOT guidance in England and Wales and equality for disabled veterans.	
237	2017 Meetings	
237.1	The last meeting for 2017 will be held on 8 December which will likely be from 1000 to 1500.	
237.2	The Committee formally requests the attendance of a local welfare manager from the VWS.	
237.3	There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 1231hrs.	