

Scotland Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committee (VAPC) Meeting

Monday the 13th of October 2021, Held Virtually

Present: David Page, Chair (DP); Huw Sherrard, Secretary (HS); Ally Gemmell (AG); Audrey Cuthbertson (AC); Kate Thomas (KT); Mark Logie (ML); Stuart Roberts (SRo); Sue Raw (SRa); Andrew Ward (AW); Iain Findlay (IF); Alan Hamilton (AH); Sandra Reid (SRe).

Apologies: Laura Cox, Vice Chair (LC).

Absent: Jim Wilson (JW), Caroline Robertson (CR), Megan Brackley (MB), Bill Lindsay (BL), Paul Cleugh (PC), Donald Prentice (DP), Don Young (DY), Mike McCourt (MMcC), Richard Anderson (RA), Jock Drysdale (JD).

1. Welcome and Apologies

DP welcomed those present to the meeting, and passed on LC's apologies.

2. Update from UK Chairs meeting.

DP provided an update to the committee regarding the previous day's meeting. A commitment had still not been made by the Minister for Defence People and Veterans to update the Terms of Reference (ToR) for VAPCs, and a closed meeting with the Chairs and the minister would be held on the 26th of October. DP suggested that he highlight the committee's frustration with the continued delay, as well as specific concerns regarding the committee's ability to work with stakeholders in a devolved context until the ToR was updated.

A number of VAPCs were postponing recruitment to fill vacancies until an update to the ToR was committed to, or were recruiting while communicating to applicants the discrepancy between the advertised role of VAPCs and the statutory reality.

DP passed on an update on Operation Courage provided at the Chairs meeting, as well as an update on training available to VAPC members, which LC would present at a future meeting.

DP provided an update to the UK Chairs meeting regarding the Scotland VAPC's appointment of office bearers, and his communication with Keith Brown MSP, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans. A future meeting with Keith Brown MSP would ideally take place after the TOR was amended. Updates from other VAPCs included the Northern Ireland committee's involvement in the 'Moving Wreath', an initiative for Remembrance Day, and the Welsh committee utilising the Welsh language alongside English in their work. DP asked the committee's opinion on utilising both English and Gaelic in the future. AW suggested that the contexts of the Scotland committee and the Welsh committee regarding dual languages were very different. SRo outlined its potential benefits in the future regardless of comparative demand. ML asked if there were any Gaelic speakers on the committee, and if not whether it could be a priority for future recruitment. DP agreed to table it for discussion at a later date.

DP raised awareness of the upcoming requirement to provide an annual report from the VAPC, and suggested that the focus would be on the recent merger of East Scotland and West Scotland committees, and the required updates to the TOR.

DP outlined ongoing discourse regarding the role of the 'Chair of Chairs' as a conduit between VAPCs collectively and relevant UK Government and public authority stakeholders, which some

committees viewed as potentially diminishing their own voices and ability in their remit as public appointees. The Scotland committee supported the concept that each VAPC member and committee as a whole should be perceived as equal as a public appointee, and the role of the Chair of Chairs could negatively effect this.

DP outlined ongoing efforts to introduce an updated VAPC into legislation.

2. Governance Requirements

HS suggested that, following the recent amalgamation and the restructuring of the VAPC's sub-committees, a renewed focus on the statutory governance requirements would be valuable. This especially included the requirements for sub-committees to minute their meetings.

DP agreed, and highlighted wider work to meet wider governance requirements for the committee, as well as suggesting that for the purposes of 'signing' minutes a digital equivalent would suffice. The committee agreed.

3. Firm Base Scotland engagement and coverage.

DP provided an outline of the current context of Firm Bases in Scotland, and outlined the potential for the committee's involvement in them. Various committee members explained their experience regarding Firm Bases, with the general consensus being that with an updated TOR there would be a clear basis to attend - potentially facilitated with support from Keith Brown MSP and collaboration with COSLA.

4. AOB

JD had emailed DP regarding GPs and whether they recorded information regarding service users' status within the Armed Forces. The committee agreed to discuss it further at a later meeting.

AW described how he has shared some of our work with his personal network of servicepeople, and feedback was very positive.

ML outlined his involvement in 'Sporting Memories', and how he had reached out to JW regarding how it might be of interest to Veterans Scotland. A story regarding an ex-serviceperson involved in Sporting Memories was to be shared in the imminent future

HS explained how Cross-Party Groups (CPGs) were being renewed, and whether the committee could apply for formal membership to the CPG on Armed Forces and Veterans, as well as the potential for sub-committees to apply for membership to relevant Cross-Party Groups to their remit. The committee agreed, reliant on the future implementation of the updated TOR.

Signed as true on 10/11/21 by Laura Cox, Vice Chair:

