

REPORT ON VETERANS ADVISORY & PENSIONS COMMITTEES PILOT

PART 1 – INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND, EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

1 In June 2011 the Cabinet Office issued new guidance on the review process for all Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDBPs). The War Pensions Committees are established as Advisory Non Departmental Public Bodies and the Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committee (VAPC) pilot have been administered as such. New Cabinet Office guidance (DBI/Public Bodies Reform dated 28 July 2011), requires all NDPBs to undergo triennial reviews. The triennial review of the VAPCs is now complete. The review examined a number of options including moving the functions to Private Companies, 3rd Sector, or in-house, and concluded that for reasons of political impartiality they must be discounted. The NDPB model is the most appropriate way of delivering the advice and functions of the VAPCs. A review of Corporate Governance arrangements has also been conducted and confirms that the VAPCs meet best practice.

2 The start of the review and its conclusion should be announced in a Written Ministerial Statement (WMS). As the review of the VAPC pilot had already been commissioned before this new guidance was issued, and a WMS has also been issued to announce the review of the VAPC pilot, there is no plan to make any further announcements about the review. We will instead issue a WMS announcing the conclusion of the evaluation report.

BACKGROUND

3 In 2009 a full review of the War Pensions Committees (WPC) was commissioned. The review team was lead by the Ministry of Defence Policy area for Pensions Compensation and Veterans, and looked primarily at the role and functions of the committees, and the requirement for their continuation. The general consensus of Central Advisory Committee on Pensions and Compensation (CAC) members was that they saw a continued role for the WPCs and the Chairman of the Confederation of British Service and Ex-service Organisations suggested ways in which he saw an enhanced role for the committees. It was considered that other roles might emerge from the review. After consultation with internal and external stakeholders it was agreed by all that the WPCs in their current role were restricted in their functions and did not reflect the current veterans' environment, but that there remained a requirement for politically impartial advice on pensions and compensation issues.

4 The review identified an opportunity to allow the remodelled WPCs to work alongside the Welfare Pathway pilots, expanding the range of help and advice available to in-Service personnel, veterans and their families. The WPCs also had an opportunity to expand their role beyond the War Pensions Scheme to include advice and support on the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, and veterans' issues in general. A role was identified where their regional expertise would be essential in ensuring that the nation's commitment to cross government support to veterans could be monitored. The Committees would act as advocates for veterans. This would help to generate some evidence on the

precise nature and effectiveness of the Government's veterans' initiatives and for the committees to demonstrate that they provide value for money.

5 A new role was determined and a change of name agreed to differentiate between the previous War Pensions Committee role as set out in the Statutory Instrument and the new one. The re-vamped committees, renamed as the Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committees (VAPCs), were launched as a 12 month pilot from September 2010, negating the need to amend the Statutory Instrument until the completion and the evaluation of the pilot.

6 A WMS was made in the House on 14 December 2009.

The Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committees (VAPCs) are a new regional network that will help veterans and their families to access vital welfare support.

The pilot scheme will see 13 new regional groups – or 'Veterans Advisory & Pensions Committees' – across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. They will ensure that the best possible service is provided locally.

The new committees will build on the role of existing War Pension Committees and will be made up of volunteers from a cross-section of the local community with a genuine interest in furthering the support available to Veterans and their families, including health, social care, legal professionals and veterans groups. The new committees will advocate for Veterans in support of the Service Personnel Command Paper, which sets out the nation's commitment to cross-Government support to Veterans, and the Welfare Pathway, an initiative to improve access to help, advice and benefits for members of the Armed Forces, veterans and their families.

The new committees will initially be piloted for a 12 month period with a review point at 6 months.

There will be thirteen regional Veterans Advisory & Pensions Committees in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, each having between 12 and 20 members.

EVALUATION

Methodology

7 In conducting an assessment of the pilot phase, the Head of Veterans Services (HVS) at the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (SPVA) visited all thirteen UK Committees to attend a committee meeting. All the committees were asked to provide formal evidence on their activities and progress. Additional discussions took place with both veterans and the organisations who represent them. This was done at a number of different levels, including obtaining views from those who may be seen as customers of the committees. COBSEO and all the principal service charities have contributed to the review;

the approach was to seek views at a practical and working level from those organisations. Routine VAPC business is co-ordinated through the Focal Point within SPVA, which provided additional evidence on the span and frequency of activity.

Findings

8 Evidence indicates that the overall progress being made by the VAPCs can be characterised as 'strong' and in most cases has exceeded expectations of what realistically might have been achieved within the relatively short pilot timescale. The review found that generally there was a vibrancy and business about the committees that gives confidence that they are likely to develop greater capacity to deliver over time.

9 While there were significant areas of best practice that should be promulgated across all the committees to ensure better outcomes, there were nevertheless a small number of committees which were significantly weaker and, assuming the VAPCs continue, would require management intervention by Minister and HVS. This weakness manifested itself through some committees having insufficient numbers of committee members to conduct business effectively, and in some cases members were drawn from a less diverse background than the stronger committees. New Chairs will need to be found to fill gaps caused by resignations and membership on some committees increased to bring them to full strength. It is critical to recruit a diverse committee membership as this is a factor in their ability to provide impartial advice.

10 The principal activities of the committees can be divided into five areas:

- Engaging with regional partners to promote the services that they provide to veterans
- Co-ordinating support to individual vulnerable veterans, and where necessary championing their cases
- Strengthening and improving the regional work for veterans between the public and voluntary sector
- Where issues are raised by pensioners/veterans concerning decisions taken by SPVA in individual cases, examining these and where necessary, making recommendations back to SPVA to improve decision making or service provision
- Acting as bodies to consult by Pensions Compensation and Veterans (PCV) policy for proposed legislative and administrative changes concerning pensions and compensation

Engaging with regional partners

11 All the committees have made significant progress in drawing in regional partners to their work, particularly in the areas of local government, health and with the voluntary and charitable sector.

12 This has taken the form of local government and health partners being appointed as members of the VAPCs, 'champions' being appointed in local authorities and new partnerships being developed in areas such as housing and health. Some local authorities,

for example Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Glasgow and Wigan, have been encouraged by the VAPCs to set up 'Veterans' Charters', giving clear public statements about how veterans will be prioritised in the provision of local services, with access points being made available to help them engage with the full range of local services. Some of these are manifest in the development of 'one stop shops'.

13 Engagement with health bodies, in particular Strategic Health Authorities (SHA) and Primary Care Trusts (PCT), has strengthened the practical access routes to health provision for veterans. For example, the South West VAPC has worked closely with their SHA, and through that the health providers in the South West, are hosting a regional conference in November 2011 to raise the issues of veterans' health and improved provisions. With current proposed changes to health delivery architecture the VAPCs could potentially be very important in championing health provision for veterans as the new services in health are planned and rolled out.

14 There is work ongoing to strengthen the links between the serving and veteran communities by co-ordinating the work of the VAPCs with the Firm Base strategy. The North East and Yorkshire and Humber Committee Chairmen are working with the 15 Brigade Commander to develop a joint strategy for external engagement.

Co-ordination of support to individual vulnerable veterans

15 Evidence indicates that the VAPCs have become valuable hubs where activity to help individual veterans who become particularly vulnerable can be co-ordinated. Indeed, the VAPCs are the only effective regional body at which the statutory and voluntary sectors with an interest in veterans meet. The SPVA Veterans Welfare Service is embedded within each of the committees, as are welfare staff from a range of voluntary sector providers, such as RBL, SSAFA, Blesma, Poppy Scotland and a wide range of others. This meeting point, which provides an opportunity for the relationships between these organisations to mature and develop, allows interventions to be co-ordinated better and the Chairmen to follow up progress on individual cases, allowing them to keep in sight any necessary joined up work to protect the most vulnerable. Each committee has assisted an average of 30-35 individuals by providing a variety of practical advice and assistance in dealing with pensions problems and have been actively involved with complaints to the SPVA Independent Complaints Panel.

Strengthening and improving the regional work for veterans between the public and voluntary sector

16 It was clear from the evidence that the veterans' space is crowded, complicated and varies very significantly from region to region. The VAPCs provide the co-ordinating point to: allow a more strategic view of provision for veterans in the region; look at where services could be co-ordinated more effectively; and, where possible, allow more joined-up activity to be undertaken. This has the potential benefit of delivering more from the same, or even less, resources. There was strong evidence that individual veterans often ask for help from a range of organisations at the same time, sometimes causing resources to be duplicated and therefore wasted. The regional constitution of the Committees for England and the devolved administrations, is strengthened by the existence of public sector government arrangements and ensures consistent approaches and support to the UK-wide framework of the VAPCs which could not be easily provided by other sectors.

17 As an example, in Wales, there is very close working between the sectors and different veterans' organisations, making it possible to cover some of the less populated areas of Mid and West Wales. There are opportunities to manage casework at a regional level; work is ongoing with COBSEO and SPVA to look at the options to improve co-ordination and delivery. Again, there are opportunities to reduce costs and deliver improved services with less resource.

Examining decisions taken by the SPVA in respect of administration of veterans services

18 This is an important role that the VAPCs effectively inherited from the War Pension Committees. Over the period of the review almost all had raised individual cases for reconsideration by SPVA. SPVA being the single provider of pensions and compensation to members of the Armed Forces, and sponsor of the VAPCs, and values the consistent impartial advice provided by the network of VAPCs. In some cases these have led to procedural changes that have benefitted wider customer groups.

19 All these cases have been considered sensitively, rigorously and with the full engagement of the individual veteran. The VAPCs have kept all parties fully informed on progress. In all the cases referred to SPVA HVS action has been taken to resolve the issue raised. The VAPCs have additionally been firm in not circumventing existing processes and in being honest with individuals where they have felt that their cases did not have merit.

20 The engagement of senior VAPC members on the Independent Complaints Panel has been invaluable in resolving some particularly contentious cases.

Acting as bodies to consult by PCV for proposed legislative and administrative changes

21 As the Chair of the VAPC Chairs sits on the Central Advisory Committee for Pensions and Compensation (the CAC), along with another VAPC member, VAPC views are sought ahead of legislative change to the War Pensions, Armed Forces Pension and Compensation Schemes. VAPC input to this process is valuable, especially given their non-partisan position.

Consideration

22 The Veterans Advisory and Pension Committees are making strong progress against the original ambitions for their purpose at start-up. It is likely that they will build on that progress, which could be accelerated by further management measures.

23 The regional co-ordination of activity on veterans' issues is an important role for the nation supporting governmental ambitions on the Military Covenant. Without the committees or a similar body it seems likely that this work would not take place. It would be necessary to create other regional or local bodies to co-ordinate activity to realise these ambitions. The VAPCs cost £43.5k per year. Members are volunteers and the financial contribution from the Department is for meeting costs and out of pocket expenses. These costs are relatively low given the services they provide. It is likely that the effective co-ordination of regional services that the VAPCs are already delivering to veterans are having a positive benefit to the taxpayer in real terms.

24 Some of the most important aspects of the work of the VAPCs are the work they do to help individual vulnerable veterans. This often takes the form of emergency case

conferences, often utilising 'phone and other media, to co-ordinate rapid reaction to a particular crisis. It is clear that the service charities regard the opportunities presented by the VAPCs as being an important means of engaging with each other on individual cases. There was evidence that the gravitas of the committee helped to galvanise other organisations into looking more closely at individual cases and providing a greater level of support.

25 As the VAPCs provide a valuable service which supports the ethos of the Military Covenant, abolition was never considered as a viable option. Additionally, whilst some may hold the view that the VAPCs could be accommodated within other government functions (Communities and Local Government and the Scottish and Welsh Assemblies) or within the private or voluntary and charitable sector, the commitments given within the Military Covenant mean that the VAPCs responsibilities are best delivered by a public body that can act as advocates for implementing improved cross-Government support. A number of options including moving the functions to Private Companies, 3rd Sector, or in-house mergers within the Public Sector, have been considered but concluded that for reasons of political impartiality they must be discounted. The NDPB model is the most appropriate way of delivering the advice and functions of the VAPCs, see Annex 2 – Part 1. They can more properly call to account other public bodies for their engagement with individual veterans, and work with policy-makers to help shape government delivery architecture and legislation. Therefore, it would not be appropriate, given their key role of scrutiny and consultation, for the VAPCs to be brought in-house, as a strong element of protected independence is necessary for their continued effectiveness. 3rd and Private sector coverage, regionally and nationally, isn't guaranteed for a UK-wide VAPC network and for very good reasons they are motivated differently, hence political impartiality stays with the public sector.

26 Government has set 'three tests' for each of the functions of Non Departmental Public Bodies. These are:

- Is this a technical function which needs external expertise to deliver?
- Is this a function which needs to be, and seen to be, delivered with absolute political impartiality?
- Is this a function which needs to be delivered independent of ministers to establish facts and figures with integrity?

27 It is clear that this is not a technical function, but a significant amount of expertise is needed to understand the complex issues around pensions, compensation, welfare and broader benefits for veterans. There are broader opportunities to understand and help with access to the relevant regional architecture that delivers the range of outcomes to that community. The VAPCs extend the reach of MOD into the regions.

28 The scrutiny role of the VAPCs needs to be delivered with **absolute political impartiality**.

29 The VAPCs have a role to establish facts in both individual cases and in their effective response to departmental and wider consultation that needs to be delivered independent of ministers to ensure honesty and integrity.

CONCLUSION

30 During early consultation with Service and Ex-service organisations their views were clear in that they, as charities, had their own priorities, aims and objectives which would bias any functions if the work of the committees was passed to them. The committee members pride themselves on their impartiality and independence and with the members being selected using the OCPA code of practice, each member understands that they are personally appointed for the individual skills they bring to the committee, rather than their association with a particular charity.

31 The SPVA use the VAPCs to independently monitor the service it provides to its customers by asking them to accompany welfare managers in visits to clients and to act as an independent complaints panel dealing with customer complaints about standards of service. This function is vital in assisting SPVA to ensure that it provides the best service to its customers and in ensuring that any failures are identified and improvements made quickly. These functions need to be delivered independently to ensure integrity of the complaints process to customers.

32 With the publication of the Military Covenant, establishment of Community Covenants and Regional Armed Forces Forums the VAPCs are ideally placed to provide independent and unbiased advice and guidance to Local Authorities, Health Authorities and Local Government on issues effecting veterans at a local level.

33 When the future of the VAPCs is agreed, the Statutory Instrument (SI) establishing the War Pensions Committees will be revoked and a new SI establishing the committees laid to underpin their roles and functions and define them in law.

Proposed Final Detailed Role and Functions of the VAPCs

Raising awareness

Raising awareness especially at local level of

- a) the War Pensions Scheme
- b) Armed Forces Compensation Scheme
- c) SPVA Veterans Welfare Service
- d) the availability of cross government support to the Armed Forces, their families and Veterans.

Veterans Initiatives

- a) Support the Ministry of Defence by acting as advocates for the implementation of cross government support to injured personnel, their dependants and veterans. Highlighting gaps or issues in provision and feeding these back initially through SPVA or any mechanism subsequently put in place by the providing Department or organisation.
- b) Understand the Welfare Provision Network in the local areas and assist Veterans and dependants in accessing local service as envisaged under the Service Personnel Command Paper, where individuals are unable to obtain the required support – i.e. work with all parties to act as advocates for individuals experiencing difficulty in accessing services and benefits.
- c) The committees do not provide welfare support themselves but can support individuals and should refer cases for SPVA Welfare assessment where appropriate.
- d) Support the SPVA by monitoring its welfare service and liaising with other organisations with a view to ensuring the welfare needs of veterans and their dependants are addressed.

Advising and representing

- a) Assisting individuals with any problems or complaints they have regarding the war pensions or AFCS claims process, where there is no formal recourse to an independent body, liaising closely with SPVA.
- b) Offering an independent explanation of the scheme as it relates to an individual, assessing issues in response to specific complaints.
- c) Providing a formal independent review of complaints, convening an Independent Complaints Panel where necessary, as outlined by the SPVA complaints procedure.

Consultation

Based on involvement in the wider process and contact with individuals in the local areas, act as a conduit for local consultation by Ministers, the Ministry of Defence and the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (SPVA) on issues affecting recipients of pension from the War Pensions Scheme and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme awards.

Number of Committees and Membership

There will be thirteen regional Veterans Advisory & Pensions Committees in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, each having between 12 and 20 members. The nine committees for England will replicate the geographical boundaries of the English Regions with one committee for Wales and Northern Ireland and two committees for Scotland.

All appointments will be made on merit against a published set of job and person specifications.

Delivery Options	Appropriate	Justification
Department	No	The 13 VAPCs consists of a cross section of individuals who represent Veterans and their families in the local community. They are unpaid volunteer advisers, working from home, performing their role on a part time basis. Therefore this classification is not appropriate.
Non-Ministerial Department	No	N/A
Executive Agency (General)	No	The functions of the VAPCs does not warrant the creation of a separate structure.
Executive Agency (Trading Fund)	No	N/A
Executive NDPB	No	The VAPCs are purely an advisory body, they do not administer public funds or have decision making functions.
Advisory NDPB	Yes	The VAPCs provide independent, impartial advice to ministers and the MoD as well as to Veterans and their families on Pensions and Compensation. The VAPCs have no financial responsibilities and are sponsored by the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (SPVA). There are 13 Regional Committees covering the UK. The VAPCs fully fulfil the definition of an Advisory NDPB, as outlined in the Cabinet Office's guidance.
Tribunal NDPBs	No	N/A
Independent Monitoring Board of Prisons, Immigration Removal Centres and Immigration Holding Facility	No	N/A
Ad Hoc Advisory Bodies, Task Forces and Reviews	No	The VAPCs will replace the War Pensions Committees who are currently established as ANDPBs and by statutory instrument. There is a continued requirement for the VAPCs to perform their functions in support of The Covenant and the Big Society beyond 2 years.

Stakeholder Groups/Forums	No	The VAPCs consists of individuals who are experts in their specific fields and not as representatives of organisations. Therefore this classification is not appropriate.
Public Sector Working Groups	No	These comprise 2/3rds public servants. The value of the VAPCs lies in the fact that they are made up of independent impartial individuals from a cross section of the local community who represent the interests of veterans and their families and who bring specific skills to the functions of the committees. If the majority of the VAPCs were to be public servants, this would dilute the value of their independence, impartiality and the advice they provide to SPVA, Ministers and Central Government to the extent that the presentational value of having the Committees would be diminished.
Internal Advisory Committee	No	The VAPCs consists of independent individuals with local knowledge of the community which is not available in-house. The VAPCs are not concerned with internal Government business as these committees are. Therefore an Internal Advisory Committee would not be appropriate.
Public Corporation	No	N/A
NHS Special Health Authorities	No	N/A
Offices	No	These are staffed 100% by civil servants and therefore would not be appropriate for the VAPCs.
Statutory Office-Holder	No	N/A
Parliamentary Body	No	N/A

PART 2 - PRINCIPLES OF GOOD CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

ACCOUNTABILITY

Statutory Accountability

Principle

The VAPCs comply with all applicable statutes and regulations, and other relevant statements of best practice.

The VAPCs are Advisory Non Department Public Bodies whose members are unpaid. They do not administer any public funds. VAPCs operate in line with statutory requirements and the spirit of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. They have a Publication Scheme. They do proactively release information that is of legitimate public interest where this is consistent with the provisions of the Act.

The VAPCs are compliant with Data Protection and FOI legislation.

The public body is subject to the Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967.

Ministerial Accountability

Principle

The Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans is ultimately accountable to Parliament and the public for the overall performance of the VAPCs.

The Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans exercises appropriate scrutiny and oversight of the VAPCs by attending one of the biannual VAPC Chair's meetings and receiving a report on activities at the Central Advisory Committee on Pensions and Compensation (CAC). A formal annual report is not produced at present and the VAPCs are aware of this requirement. The formal process will be put in place pending development of a new website and future discussions. In the interim, the Minister has the power to escalate any matters arising if necessary.

.Appointments of Chairs and Members are made in line with statutory requirements and with the *Code of Practice* issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. The Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans appoints the 13 chairs and all members of the 13 VAPCs. The Minister is able to remove individuals whose performance or conduct is unsatisfactory.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Role of the Sponsoring Department

Principles

The Head of Veterans Services on behalf of the Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans is responsible for ensuring that there are robust governance arrangements within the VAPCs. These arrangements set out the terms of their relationship and explain how they will be put in place to promote high performance and safeguard propriety and regularity.

There is a dedicated sponsor team within the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency, the VAPC Focal Point, that provides appropriate oversight and scrutiny of, and support and assistance to the 13 VAPCs.

Supporting provisions

A dedicated VAPC Focal Point within the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (SPVA) provides advice and guidance to the VAPC chairs and members. Formal guidance is available by way of written *notes for members* which includes a copy of the Cabinet Office *code of conduct for board members of public bodies*.

There is an established communications channel which enables regular and ongoing dialogue between the SPVA and VAPCs. The Head of Veterans Services (HVS), SPVA, chairs a biannual VAPC Chair's meeting and attends at least one of each of the 13 VAPC meetings per annum. HVS appraises the chairmen in line with the requirements of the *Code of Practice* issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Role of the Board

Principles

The VAPCs are led by the Chair of Chairs and the Head of Veterans Services who collectively have responsibility for the overall performance and success of the body and provide strategic leadership, direction, support and guidance.

The VAPCs have an appropriate balance of skills, experience, independence and knowledge. Chairs and members are recruited under open and fair competition. The MoD is committed to equality of opportunity for all and the principle of appointment based on merit following an open and transparent process and independent assessment.

Supporting provisions

- There is an agreed Partnership Protocol which defines the Partnership and support SPVA provides to VAPCs

- There are published Terms of Reference at Annex1 – Part 1, which define the role of the VAPCs. This will be embedded in a Statutory Instrument.
- The 13 regional VAPCs each meet between 2 and 4 times per year.
- The 13 Chairs meet twice per year to agree strategy and are formally recognised as a sub-committee of the Central Advisory Committee on Pensions and Compensation (CAC). Any items of strategic business can be referred to the CAC.
- Two Chairs, one of which is the Chair of Chairs, represent the VAPCs on the CAC.
- Responsibility for annual appraisal sits with the Head of Veterans Services who appraises the 13 Chairs on their performance. Consequently, the 13 Chairs annually appraise their members on performance against the functions of the committee. Should a problem arise concerning performance or conduct the matter may require escalation to the Minister at that stage.
- All VAPC Chairs and members are un-paid and receive out of pocket expenses only. There is a small budget of £45k which is administered and checked by the Focal Point in SPVA.
- The VAPCs operate accountably and responsively in accordance with ANDPB framework guidance.

Role of the Chair of Chairs

Principle

The Chair of Chairs is responsible for leadership of the VAPCs and for ensuring their overall effectiveness.

Supporting provisions

The VAPCs are led by a Chair of Chairs who is responsible for the overall effectiveness of the 13 Committees. The individual is nominated and elected by the 13 Chairs.

The responsibilities of the Chair of Chairs are;

- to sit on the CAC representing the views of all 13 VAPCs in discussions with Ministers.
- to ensure that the VAPCs, in reaching decisions, takes proper account of guidance provided by the Ministry of Defence and Other Government Departments and Ministers.
- to ensure that the VAPCs carry out their business efficiently and effectively;
- to represent the views of the VAPCs to the general public; and

- to develop an effective working relationship with the Head of Veterans Services in SPVA and Head of Pensions, Compensation and Veterans as well as other senior staff within Defence.

Role of individual Chairs

Principle

The Chairs of each individual Committee are responsible for the overall effectiveness of their VAPC The Chairs are recruited under open and fair competition principles.

Supporting provisions

Each VAPC is led by a Chair with between 12-20 members who promote the interests of Veterans and their families.

The responsibilities of the Chairs include:

- To ensure that their VAPC carries out it's business efficiently and effectively.
-
- To act as advocates for implementing improved cross-Government support
-
- To assist serving personnel, families and veterans in accessing support

EFFECTIVE FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Principle

The VAPCs have taken appropriate steps to ensure that effective systems of financial management and internal control are in place.

Supporting provisions

The VAPCs do not administer any public funds nor do they have responsibility for any budget. Their allocated funding for out of pocket expenses is held by the SPVA and is administered by the VAPC Focal Point (officials within SPVA), in accordance with Government accounting rules. The rules for VAPC members claiming expenses are based on the eligibility criteria for MoD civilian staff and are published in the *VAPC Notes for members*.

Internal Controls

There are clear rules in place governing the claiming of expenses. These are published in the guidance *notes for members* and given to each member as part of their appointment pack. Effective checking systems are in place to ensure compliance with these rules. The VAPC Focal Point proactively publish information on expenditure.

COMMUNICATIONS

Principle

The VAPCs are open, transparent, accountable and responsive.

Supporting provisions

Communications with Stakeholders

The VAPC Chair of Chairs meets with representatives of its key stakeholders at the CAC meetings and has an established channel of communication with these organisations.

Communications with the Public

- The VAPCs make an explicit commitment to openness in all their activities and publish these on their web-site. They publish appropriate details of Chairs and members together with appropriate contact details.
- The VAPCs consider holding open committee meetings.
- The VAPCs proactively publish agendas and minutes of Committee meetings on their web-site.
- The VAPCs proactively publish data on their activities.
- In accordance with transparency best practice, VAPCs will publish their spend data over £500.

The public body has an established and effective correspondence handling and complaint procedure. All Complaints are taken seriously and where appropriate, complaints can be subject to investigation by the Parliamentary Ombudsman¹⁵.

Marketing and PR

The VAPCs comply with the Government's conventions on publicity and advertising¹⁶. These conventions are understood by the Focal Point who ensures that conventions are complied with. The VAPCs have access to the services of the SPVA Press and Communications team

¹⁵ This requires the public body to be listed in the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967

¹⁶ "Public Bodies: A Guide for Departments", Cabinet Office, 2006
<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/public-bodies-and-appointments>

CONDUCT AND BEHAVIOUR

Principle

The VAPCs work to the highest personal and professional standards. They promote the values of the committees and of good governance through their conduct and behaviour.

Supporting provisions

Conduct

The *Cabinet Office Code of Conduct* sets out the standards of personal and professional behaviour expected of all Chairs and members. This forms part of the terms and conditions of appointment. The *VAPC notes for members* set out the rules on conduct and behaviour. The *notes for members* are based on the *Code of Conduct*.

There are clear rules and procedures in place for managing conflicts of interest. There is a publicly available Register of Interests for members. This is regularly updated.

There are clear rules and guidelines in place on political activity for members. There are effective systems in place to ensure compliance with any restrictions.

Leadership

Chairs should show leadership by conducting themselves in accordance with the highest standards of personal and professional behaviour and in line with the principles set out in respective *Codes of Conduct*.



SPVA/VAPC

PARTNERSHIP PROTOCOL



1 Introduction

- 1.1 Purpose** of Protocol is: **Define the Partnership and outline support SPVA offers VAPC's.**
- 1.2** VAPC's are independent non departmental public bodies established by Parliament under the War Pensions Act 1921 and the Social Security Act 1989. Members are appointed by, and responsible to, the SofS for Def. Implicit in that responsibility is the obligation to provide VAPC's with suitable support from within the MoD/SPVA.

2 Structure

- 2.1** Given that obligation VAPC's have a legitimate expectation for continued access to appropriate levels of support, currently: a dedicated, staffed VAPC Focal Point (FP); regionally focused welfare support (RWM/VWS); reprographic, stationery and despatch services (central pool resources); Media/Press Services (Media Communications).
- 2.2** The Partnership will meet 2-3 times per year to discuss matters of mutual interest and support; normally combined with VAPC Chairs Conference, itself sponsored and facilitated by SPVA.
- 2.3** Strategic issues will be represented externally by VAPC Chair of Chairs e.g. through the CAC, CAG and Head of PCV.
- 2.4** Operational issues will be represented, within geographical boundaries, by VAPC Regional Chairs; trends and wider issues should be brought to the attention of the CAG through the VAPC representative on that group.
- 2.5** Departmental issues will be represented by SPVA.

3 Membership

- 3.1** Chairs of VAPC's, Head of Veterans Services SPVA, SPVA Focal Point and VWS Staff will comprise the Partnership along with any co-opted members formally approved by the Membership.

4 Internal Accountability

- 4.1** All members of the Partnership shall abide by recognised Departmental (MoD) procedures, guidelines and OCPA standards for ensuring probity and good governance in public life, also set out in "Notes for Members".

5 Responsibilities

5.1 VAPC's agree to:

- 5.1.1** Take the lead for *development* of the vision and Priorities.
- 5.1.2** Translate vision and priorities into Regional action plans including Regional Public Relations.
- 5.1.3** Discharge responsibilities as defined by USofS (through MoD/SPVA) within regional boundaries.
- 5.1.4** Run VAPC Meetings, Chairs setting Agenda and Members producing Minutes/Action Points.
- 5.1.5** Provide objective evidence to FP to demonstrate delivery of effect & justify allocated resources.
- 5.1.6** Ensure resources are spent/applied within remit in accordance with MoD policy/guidelines.
- 5.1.7** Verify/Authorise expenses claims prior to submission to FP for processing.

5.2 SPVA agrees to (see also section 2.1 above):

- 5.2.1 Ensure VAPC's are appraised of all relevant MoD policy issues and developments (FP).
- 5.2.2 Ensure existing SPVA resources are allocated to support MoD aspirations for VAPC's (FP).
- 5.2.3 Raise awareness of VAPC's within central design for promotion of veterans related issues and initiatives (Comms).
- 5.2.4 Maintain a dedicated website and ensure VAPC information is maintained up to date (Comms); however this agreement is dependent on web site management remaining within SPVA authority.
- 5.2.5 Collate evidence of delivery of VAPC effect, submitted by VAPCs, including performance reporting mechanisms to provide for assessment of impact (FP).
- 5.2.6 Produce an annual review of VAPC progress for reporting to CAC/CAG (FP).
- 5.2.7 Maintain a central register of AF Champions by County with information provided by VAPCs (FP).
- 5.2.8 Offer training materiel/courses to provide for professional development of VAPC's (FP).
- 5.2.9 Provide administrative assistance to VAPC's¹⁷, specifically; **FP**: advice on Departmental process (e.g. expenses), coordinating reprographic and despatch requests and collating relevant Panel Case documentation; **RWM/VWS**: support arranging venues for VAPC meeting (in MoD premises only), assistance sending hard copy mail & providing VAPC's regionally focused briefings if requested.
- 5.2.10 Provide other organisational support such as assistance in drafting and distributing letters, governance and reporting mechanisms, recruitment and taking forward policy issues (FP).

6 Contracts

- 6.1 Contracts with third parties will only be entered into by SPVA, on behalf of the Partnership.

VAPC Chair of Chairs

SPVA Head of Veterans Services

Signature: Original signed

Signature: Original signed

Name: Ray Holland

Name: Jon Parkin

Date: 9 Feb 2011

Date: 9 Feb 2011

¹⁷ See also Appendix 7 to Hand Book