

Social Security Act 1989

North East Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committee

Minutes of meeting held on 21 May 2012
at 101 (Northumbrian) Regiment Royal Artillery
Kingston Park TA Centre, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Present:	Mr P E Kingham (<i>Chairman</i>)	(PK)
	Lt Col J Heron TD (<i>Vice Chairman</i>)	(JH)
	Mrs S Crosby	(SC)
	Mrs J V Gibson CBE	(VG)
	Lt Col B G de la Haye OBE	(BH)
	Mr P Sinclair	(PS)
	Maj A J P Watson TD (<i>Secretary</i>)	(AW)
In Attendance:	Mr J Falcus (<i>SPVA Welfare Manager</i>)	(JF)
	Mr S Davidson (DWP & Jobcentre plus)	(SD)
Apologies:	Mr P Murnane	
	Mr A Heron (WVS)	(AH)

Welcome and Introduction.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, which commenced at 1110 and it was generally 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, coupled with the new VAPC Members handbook.

Item		Action
49	Declarations of Interest	
49.1	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.	
49.2	There were no Declarations of Financial or Pecuniary Interest	
50	Confirmation of minutes	
50.1	The members confirmed the minutes of the meeting of 16 th January, previously circulated, were a true record and they were then signed by PK.	Focal Point to note
51	Matters Arising	
51.1	39.3 DWP intranet – details taken away by Norcross at meeting with DWP, BUT not taken forward as yet by Norcross. PK explained Web Site had been discussed at recent VAPC Chairs meeting when Jon Parkin had given assurance that comms team	PK

52.2	would now address this issue. PK to ask DVS for progress report. (Statement of Requirement submitted by Chair of Yorkshire & Humber Committee following consultation to be circulated with minutes for members info).	PK
52.3	45.1 SC & PS attended Stockton covenant meeting. 47.2 Appraisals will be done in due course.	
52	Chairman's report	
52.1	Circulated in advance of the meeting.	
52.2	Benefits cap/Universal credit question still ongoing SD explained local issues had been fed into centre policy but decisions were still to be taken. PK raised that no-one had said who was consulted as veterans reps; no evidence of calculations provided possibility of overstatement due to decreasing number of WPs.	
52.3	Likely no mention of War Pensions/AFCS in documents to come out this summer as position still not decided.	
52.4	PS pointed that there should be a disregard for WP/AFCS who are in same position as those civilians who get full disregard.	PK
52.5	Reimbursement of DFG info to go to councils & health authorities from sec & to be raised at forum/board meetings by members.	AW + ALL
52.6	PS – Pointed out need to protect Housing adaptation grants, which are available for those with less than 80% disablement.	PK
52.7	SPVA – Stats for both schemes shows marked increase in claims/work with the agency as at Mar 12 due to reduced staffing levels and increase in claims numbers.	
52.8	The current helpline performance is disappointing, additional staff are being recruited. Will monitor over coming months.	ALL
52.9	PS pointed out when ESA stops after 12 months for those in work group veterans are now making claims under WPS/AFCS and with increase in deterioration claims	PS/PK
52.10	PS pointed out his work in 2009 relating to LSA where claims stopped because got ESA, what is position (if got 40% WP) can they claim for ALSO as now not got ESA ? PK asked for this to be set out in writing	PK/AW

52.11	VG received confirmation that urgent/hardship cases can be fast tracked for appointments through VWS.	
52.12	BD – do we pass this info to recovery centre? VWS service imbedded in PRC service more likely that those medically discharged without going through PRC may slip through the net.	
53	Welfare Services Report	
53.1	JF explained that in the period Jan 2012 to last Friday LH made 51 visits, JF90, AH 77	
53.2	He explained from Jan 2012 all they had also been spending a day each on rotation at the Personnel Recovery Assessment Centre (PRAC) in Catterick. holding a surgery primarily for PRC patients but open to all Catterick Garrison personnel from 8am to 7pm. A new welfare officer has been recruited and following training will work from the centre.	
53.3	Management for AH & JF is now to be from Glasgow. LH is still managed from Norcross.	
53.4	The IT system in the Blyth office was described as steady, but still losing time on line occasionally. DII machines coming! SD explained 3g problems were also a common problem for DWP outreach workers.	
54	Impact of spending review	
54.1	<p>PK asked SD about effect of cap on benefits (especially on housing benefit) on an under 35 single person service leaver, given further redundancy traunch this summer. VG explained this issue had been raised at Sunderland Armed forces group – problem was with housing benefit and service organisations were worried – how do you get a job when need a home as a priority?</p> <p>Belief in certain quarters was that this potential shortfall should be picked up by services charities. SD explained that LAs should still be able to make discretionary payments for ‘vulnerable people’. PK explained that when service personnel were being treated in the same way as other members of society we should not argue for advantage. However whilst this may be the case for many if someone has spent latter part of service overseas e.g. in Germany then they would be disadvantaged if leaving service immediately on return to UK with little prospect of securing employment and accommodation prior to becoming ‘homeless’.</p>	
54.2	SD suggested a test would be how many people had been paid discretionary payments FOI request would get that information	PS/PK
54.3	PS drew attention to the proposed ‘bedroom tax’ from April 2013 whereby parents may be penalised for keeping a bedroom free for	

	<p>their service member (can't call a barrack block home). PK explained RBL had considerable reservations about the potential numbers that may be affected by the reduction in housing support available to those under 35 and potential cost to service charities if they are expected to pick up the shortfall however, thought it that possible impact on parents/other family members has been considered yet.</p>	
55	NE Armed Forces Board/Armed Forces Forums	
55.1	<p>PK confirmed that 5 councils had now signed a community covenant (Gateshead, South Tyneside, Stockton on Tees, Newcastle and Northumberland). There was discussion about attendance at the various Firm Base, Armed Forces and LA sponsored meetings and which meetings ought to be attended by whom.</p>	
55.2	<p>MCI at 15 Bde have established a NE Armed Forces board with the intent of sweeping up all of the MOD sponsored Firm Base Meetings in our area but Firm Base Commanders were still holding their own local meetings. It was agreed the position was presently unsatisfactory and unclear, but that it might be sensible if there was an over-reaching Board to give direction for Northumberland and all councils north of River Tyne and one for Durham and all councils south of River Tyne.</p>	PK
55.3	<p>It is however clear that whilst the committee should remain engaged with these MOD meetings our priority must be to ensure appropriate representation at LA Armed Forces Forums at which military civic and 3rd sector organisations attended to deal with delivery at a local level for each of the council areas. If that system was adopted then Chair/Vice-chair would attend Board and a member attend each Forum. PK will take this up with 15X.</p>	PK
55.4	<p>Pending clarification and new recruiting AW will write to relevant personnel in an attempt to get early notice of meetings and ask for volunteers to attend each meeting ad hoc, until we can look to designate members permanently to establish a rapport.</p>	AW
55.5	<p>Sheila had spoken to Darlington – matter is still pending and will keep her advised. PK explained that the Comd Catterick Garrison had regular contact with Darlington Council.</p>	
55.6	<p>PS said Middlesbrough waiting to see who was elected. Agreed that we should consider writing to Hartlepool as well.</p>	
55.7	<p>AW e-mail – SecNorthEastVAPC@aol.co.uk</p>	
56	Community Covenants Grants	
56.1	<p>PK Highlighted a recent change in the dates for submission of bids under this scheme, which had caused some LAs a problem. He</p>	ALL

	also reminded members about the scheme and asked any member going to a Forum meeting to fully understand the scheme and raise it where appropriate, especially as not all funding available is being taken up. Full details of the scheme including information about previous successful bids is at: Link to Covenant Grant Scheme	
57	Armed Forces Day 2012	
57.1	30 June 2012 events advertised on National website. VG asked if we want to use the tent from Sunderland Veterans forum at AFD or Sunderland Airshow which is on Friday 20 th July 7pm to 10pm and Saturday 21 st & Sunday 22 nd 10am to 6pm (JH & AW away at DLI memorial at Alrewas).	
57.2	To be a project – PS will take on as project officer	PS
57.3	VG will e-mail contact about being there	VG
57.4	(During discussion PK/DVS on 22 May 12 John Parkin agreed to support this high profile event by making new display material available and ensuring authorisation for overtime is agreed for attendance of Welfare Staff. PK to make initial bid through VWS management).	PK
58	Recruiting	
58.1	3 prospective members to be interviewed, with 3 in the wings – may co-opt until next recruiting round, however if this is to be in Sept/Oct 12 these prospective applicants will just be encouraged to apply at that time.	PK
58.2	Applications to join committees are now handled by Defence Business Services.	
59	Any other business	
59.1	AW raised question of disabled access to Armed Forces Forum/Network meetings. Agreed PK to take up with MCI at HQ 15 Brigade.	PK
59.2	AW raised question of DWP attendance at meetings – VG & SD will discuss and advise	VG/SD
59.3	PS asked about recent changes to the Forces Discount Scheme which now required Veterans to purchase a ‘Veterans Card’ at a cost of £24 to use the scheme.– which seemed unregulated (so anyone could obtain one and get discounts). PK agreed to take issue up with other chairmen.	PK
59.4	PS raised issue of statistics changing from quarterly to now being annual – to be issued June 2012 relating to figures for end of March 2011.	PK

59.5	PS asked if MOJ was delaying Tribunal hearings for WP/AFCS by diverting judges to sit on other Tribunals as there seemed to be delays in hearings.	AW
59.6	PS asked for clarification of independence of medical members of Tribunals, as MOJ had advised him they acted under contract with ATOS, who are DWP contracted medical examiners.	AW
60	2012 Meetings	
60.1	It was agreed the next meetings would be Friday 31 August and Monday 10 December. The locations will be notified in due course	
60.2	There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 1330	