



A NEW CHAIRMAN'S PERSPECTIVE

East of England
Jonathan Jelley MBE JP

I was appointed as Chairman of the East of England VAPC in February 2015.

Over the last 30 years, I have held a variety of senior executive positions in large financial institutions in the City of London. I have no military background. However, I have spent many years supporting SSAFA (the oldest military welfare charity in the UK) as a national trustee. People often ask me why I devote so much of my time to military welfare and veterans issues. Quite simply, the history of our great country is littered with the huge personal sacrifices made by so many and continuing to be made in keeping our country free and defending our values. This deserves our deep respect, remembrance and a lifelong commitment of support in return.

The insight that my work with SSAFA has given me of the many complex issues faced by serving, ex-service people and their families meant that I had no hesitation in taking on the role as a VAPC Chair.

The East of England region shares its borders with London, the South East and the East Midlands. It also has an extensive coastline, 121 kilometres of which are defined as heritage coast. At around 19,100 square km it is the second largest English region, below only the South West. It is larger than Northern Ireland but smaller than Scotland and Wales. The region covers 15 per cent of the total area of England and 8 per cent of the UK. Administratively, the East of England contains six counties: Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk, and six unitary authorities, Luton, Peterborough, Southend-on-Sea, Thurrock, Bedford and Central Bedfordshire. There are 44 local authority districts contained within the counties in the region.

My own personal sense is that the Covenant has been widely signed up to but is patchy in terms of adherence to its principles on the ground. This is the primary issue that we face and so awareness of our existence and our active role in changing this situation is a priority. We have contacted all Unitary and Local Authorities in our region to remind them of their obligations and have sought and received the full support of all the Lord Lieutenants. We are now building on this and developing our communication plan to include MPs, the public and health sectors, Chambers of Commerce and the third sector.

Indeed awareness and communication are the first essential tasks that will feed into a wider strategic plan that outlines our aims, objectives and outputs and how these will be measured. As Chairman, I also want to ensure that our Committee is appropriately resourced and has the essential skills to deliver such a plan. Clarity of purpose is always critical and I am hopeful that both the outcome of the triennial review and the various training courses planned over the next few months by Veterans UK will achieve this.

The East of England VAPC remains fully committed to the welfare of all Veterans and members have a strong desire to play their full part in the delivery of this with clear channels to do so. I am determined that we will become a highly effective body with a growing influence in our region that ultimately becomes a key contributor to the provision of first class welfare for all Veterans in the East of England, whatever their age or circumstances. I know of no more worthy aspiration than this!