

**MINUTES OF THE NINTH MEETING OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND
VETERANS ADVISORY AND PENSIONS COMMITTEE HELD AT THE
OFFICERS' MESS, THEIPVAL BARRACKS, LISBURN ON THURSDAY,
25TH OCTOBER 2012 AT 11:00AM**

PRESENT

John Davies (Chairman), Chris Carson, (Vice-Chairman), Mary Moreland (Secretary), Carolyn Arnold, William Ball, Mitch Bresland, Iain Creswell, Ivan Grainger, Irene Lyttle, Oliver McCullough, Alberta McMenemy and John Stewart

IN ATTENDANCE

Colonel David Russell-Parsons, Deputy Commander 38 (Irish) Brigade; Commander John Gray, Senior Royal Navy Officer Northern Ireland and Major Peter Bailie, UDR / R Irish (HS) Aftercare Service

APOLOGIES

John Dunbar, Guy McCullough, Charlie Richardson and Norman Walker

125. WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS & OPENING REMARKS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the 9th Meeting of the Northern Ireland Veterans Advisory & Pensions Committee (VAPC) extending special thanks to Commander 38 (Irish) Brigade and his staff for facilitating the meeting here today. He welcomed our guest speakers, Colonel David Russell-Parsons, Deputy Commander 38 (Irish) Brigade, Commander John Gray, Senior Royal Navy Officer Northern Ireland and Major Peter Baillie, Director UDR / R Irish (HS) Aftercare Service.

The Chairman made special note of remembering Corporals Channing Day and David O'Connor who sadly lost their lives in Afghanistan yesterday; on behalf of the Committee he extended condolences to their families.

The Chairman confirmed his retirement on 31 December 2012 and said that "after 20 years as a member of both the Northern Ireland War Pensions Committee (WPC) and VAPC, including 6 years as Vice-Chairman followed by 9 years in the Chair,

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I feel the time is now right for a new face to take the helm. A new incumbent will bring fresh ideas and an enthusiasm in addressing the many unique challenges which still face the wider veterans' community in Northern Ireland. It also provides a reasonable period of time for my successor to gain experience in post and to conduct the interview process and selection of a new Committee". The Chairman thanked the Committee for all their valued support and guidance with special mention to Ivan Grainger who "during his long and highly successful tenure as Regional Manager of the WPWS in Belfast, provided much needed advice during my tentative years in office". The Chairman also acknowledged the tremendous help, support, inspiration and great encouragement given to him during this time by his fellow UK Regional Chairs; the hard working and dedicated SPVA staff, particularly those in the Focal Point and the VWS Belfast Office.

126. APOLOGIES.

Apologies were noted.

127. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 17 MAY 2012

Minutes of the 8th Meeting held on Thursday, 17th May 2012 were agreed, having been proposed by Oliver McCullough and seconded by Carolyn Arnold. The Minutes can now be placed on the Website.

128. MATTERS ARISING

All matters arising covered under the agenda.

129. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

None.

130. REPORT BY VWS WELFARE MANAGER

As both Ben Higgins and Andrew Matthews were unable to attend the meeting due to work pressures the Chairman delivered their report, an abridged version which is now included as at Appendix 1.

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131. REVIEW OF NORTHERN IRELAND VAPC GOVERNANCE

The Northern Ireland VAPC Governance Document, which formulates the Committee role and objectives, is due for annual review in March 2013. The Chairman advised he will be inviting comments via e-mail in the near future.

132. CHAIRMAN'S BI-ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The Chairman advised that he will be attending the Bi-Annual Conference being held at SPVA Norcross during the period 31 October/1 November. Mr Davies invited items for discussion to be notified to him after the meeting. He added that a report of decisions and conclusions taken during this Conference will be forwarded to members in due course.

133. UPDATE ON ARMED FORCES COVENANT PRESENTATION

Chris Carson provided the Committee with an update on behalf of the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) Sub-group. A presentation programme is currently being undertaken and has been well received by the majority. There have been presentations to 16 Borough/City or District councils, 9 of which have appointed a Veterans Advocate and a decision from 6 others is presently awaited. Phase one of the programme is almost complete and as such the four sub groups should now be established. It is perceived that the Local Authority sub-group will take over the role of the AFC Sub-group. The Committee agreed the importance of ensuring that the momentum continues.

134. APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEE LEADS

The previously provisionally agreed appointments were proposed by William Ball, seconded by Oliver McCullough and endorsed as follows:

Local Authority Lead:	Iain Creswell
Health Lead:	Guy McCullough
Welfare Lead:	Irene Lyttle
Deputy Welfare Lead:	Mitch Bresland
PR Lead:	John Stewart

The Chairman undertook to issue TORs for these appointments.

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135. PRESENTATION BY DEPUTY CDR 38 (IRISH) BRIGADE

The Chairman introduced Colonel David Russell-Parsons thanking him for taking the time out of his busy schedule to attend our meeting. Col David thanked the Committee for the invitation and said how much he enjoyed serving in Northern Ireland. By way of background he provided a synopsis of his military career. Col David gave the forum an informative update on current military issues, highlighting some major changes as they move towards a more integrated army.

136. UPDATE ON VAPC WEBSITE

John Stewart reported that there is still work to do and also concern as to how the VAPC website is going to fit into the overall website. The website is integrated with the SPVA site and this is not seen as positive as there is a chance that VAPC information may be lost among everything else.

137. UPDATE ON UDR / R Irish (HS) AFTERCARE SERVICE

Major Peter Bailie provided the Committee with a very informative and positive synopsis of the Aftercare Service. The service in its 6th year has changed over time with good successes to date. There are approximately 150,000 veterans living in Northern Ireland. A business case has been drafted asking the MOD if they want an Aftercare Service and while the future is presently unclear, it is expected a decision is imminent; the assumption is that the decision will be in the positive. There are no known obstacles to the services existence; however its future direction is likely to see its remit change slightly. While the concentration will be on the legacy group the service may be widened to encapsulate all cap badges. Strong links have been developed with many other organisations.

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138. NORTHERN IRELAND VETERANS SEMINAR

The Chairman has been successful in obtaining funding from SPVA for the Northern Ireland VAPC to host a Veterans Seminar. The funding will cover the hire of a suitable venue, invitation of approx 100 guests with coffee on arrival, lunch and afternoon tea, plus travel expenses for our Committee Members. The invitations list will include:-

- MLAs and Local Council representation;
- Other prominent individuals,
- Service and ex-service community.

Other suggestions were to invite Ministers from the 12 Northern Ireland Departments; if the Minister cannot attend they may send their Permanent Secretary as their representative. To take arrangements forward it was agreed to establish a small sub-group as follows:-

Iain Creswell - Chair

Carolyn Arnold

Mitch Bresland

Irene Lyttle

Peter Bailie –Seconded

It is proposed that the Seminar will start at 10.00 a.m. finishing at 3.00 p.m. and follow the format below: -

- a. Welcome Address & Opening Remarks.
- b. Presentation by MOD Armed Forces Covenant Team.
- c. Presentation by SPVA.
- d. Presentation by AFC Sub-Group.
Lunch.
- e. Presentation by 38 Irish Brigade Representative.
- f. Presentation by RFCA Northern Ireland
- f. Presentation by Combat Stress.
- g. Presentation by RIRISH(HS)/UDR Welfare Aftercare Service.
- h. Open Forum and Close, followed by Afternoon Tea.

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139. FUTURE GUEST SPEAKERS

It was agreed that the Chairman would invite Jon Parkin, Head of Veterans Services at SPVA and George Black, Chairman of the Royal British Legion Northern Ireland to the next meeting. Suggestions for guest speakers for future meeting should be e-mailed to the Chairman.

140. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Chris Carson thanked everyone who asked him to put his name forward for the position of Chairman, however due to other commitments he is not in a position to consider this at the moment.

Ivan Grainger expressed his personal gratitude and also that of the Committee to the Chairman for his hard work, dedication, support and advice over his many years with the various Veterans Committees. He said that “we are all sad to be losing such a valued member of our Committee and our best wishes go to you for your future happiness”.

141. DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday, 24 January 2013 at Anderson House, Palace Barracks at 11.00 p.m.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 12:55pm.

Distribution:

Northern Ireland VA&PC Members

Welfare Managers, VWS Belfast

VA&PC Focal Point, SPVA Norcross

Regional Manager Veterans Welfare Centre, Glasgow.

Appendix 1/

**VWS WELFARE MANAGERS REPORT TO NORTHERN IRELAND VAPC
MEETING – 25 OCTOBER 2102 – ABRIDGED VERSION**

1. Both Welfare Managers continue to complete on average 25-32 home visits per month. The spread of visits still relate mainly to AFCS/WPS claims or supplementary allowance claims. Visits to discuss DWP benefits relating to DLA and employment and support allowance have increased significantly since the last VAPC Meeting. We assume that this will remain the case until more information is published regarding how the Universal Welfare Credit/Personal Invalidity Plan is to be implemented. Both Welfare Managers are due to attend a 3 day training course in Glasgow at the end of November 2102 on the implementation of these benefits and how they will overlap with AFCS/WPS payments.

2. Arrangements for client visits are now managed by the Welfare Centre in Glasgow. All client visits have been carried out within the correct time limits and no exception reports have been raised by Norcross for any clients within NI. Since the last Committee Meeting we have been involved with two in-service deaths both from the TA. These cases are currently going through the process of AFCS claims and should be resolved soon.

3. Support continues to welfare advice days organised by the Phoenix Group, Ely Centre, West Tyrone Voice and SEFF averaging about 2 -3 advice days per month, each of these organisations funded under Peace III funding have on average 12 days of funding for welfare and advice days per annum. With the number of client visits coupled with support to 38 Bde PRU and Transitional Development Working Group (TDWG) increasing, we cannot attend every advice day for these organisations and will concentrate our effort in support of advice days in areas where we have a low uptake of clients.

4. Both Welfare Managers attended the 28 day review meeting in support of the PRU at 38 Bde and to date we have given direct support to 35-40 clients under the command of the PRU in relation to AFPS-forecast of pensions, completion of Pension 1 forms.

5. Lastly, Ben Higgins is a member of the 38 Bde TDWG which has been established in order to provide support to personnel leaving the army and the transition from service to civilian life.