

**11 MINUTES OF THE ELEVENTH MEETING OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND  
VETERANS ADVISORY AND PENSIONS COMMITTEE HELD AT THE SOMME  
NURSING HOME, CIRCULAR ROAD, BELFAST, BT4 2NA ON THURSDAY, 30<sup>th</sup>  
MAY 2013 AT 11:00AM**

**PRESENT**

Chris Carson, (Acting Chairman), Mary Moreland (Secretary), Carolyn Arnold, William Ball, Mitch Bresland, John Dunbar, Ivan Grainger, Guy McCullough, Oliver McCullough, Alberta McMenemy, Norman Walker.

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Mr Rob Rowntree, Deputy Head of Veterans Services, (Operations).

**APOLOGIES**

Iain Creswell, Irene Lyttle, John Stewart.

**158. WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS & OPENING REMARKS**

The Acting Chairman welcomed everyone to the 11<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Northern Ireland Veterans Advisory & Pensions Committee (VAPC) extending special thanks to the Somme Nursing Home for their kind hospitality. He welcomed our guest speaker, Mr Rob Rowntree, Deputy Head of Veterans Services, (Operations).

**159. APOLOGIES.**

Apologies were noted.

**160. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 24 JANUARY 2013**

Minutes of the 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting held on Thursday, 24<sup>th</sup> January 2013 were agreed, having been proposed by William Ball and seconded by Carolyn Arnold. The Minutes can now be placed on the Website.

**161. MATTERS ARISING**

- a. Minute 149:- The Acting Chairman informed members that he had not, as yet, received any nominations for the post of Vice Chairman, while this currently does not cause a problem he asked members to consider further.
- b. Remaining matters arising covered under the agenda.

**162. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS**

None.

**163. REPORT BY VWS WELFARE MANAGER**

See Appendix 1.

**164. UPDATE ON VAPC WEBSITE**

There is currently a re-branding exercise underway; the VAPC will continue under the three flag brand. Contact details will change, the email is currently set up under @SPVA, this is not ideal as NI queries may get mislaid in the system, therefore the email address will change; emails will be directed to the NI Chairman, the Chairman will then be in a position to monitor queries and pass to SPVA anything that requires their input.

**165. NORTHERN IRELAND AFFAIRS COMMITTEE – CALL FOR EVIDENCE - ARMED FORCES COVENANT (NIPAC EVIDENCE)**

The enquiry is on-going with many groups having already given evidence. The next session is scheduled for 5<sup>th</sup> June 2013. It is not expected that the final report will be available before our next meeting; however publications on evidence to date are available at <http://www.parliament.uk/niacom> .

It was noted that some members were very perturbed by the evidence presented by SSAFA and the RBL.

**166. REPORT ON CHAIRMAN'S BI-ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

The Acting Chairman will circulate the minutes when available. Some points covered included

- a. Rebranding of MOD,

b/

- b. Website contact details,
- c. Recruitment/replacement of Chairmen and Members,
- d. Recruitment will now happen at the same time each year;
- e. Chairman's recruitment extended to 14<sup>th</sup> June 2013,
- f. Members recruitment closes 24<sup>th</sup> June 2013,
- g. One application has been received for NI Chairman and 2 applications for members with a further 2 expressions of interest,
- h. The Chairman will be in place before interviews are held to select new members; this is to enable the Chairman to sit on the interview selection panel.

**167. APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS**

Covered under previous item.

**168. INFORMATIVE TALK BY ROB ROWNTREE THE NEW DEPUTY HEAD OF VETERANS SERVICES (OPERATIONS)**

Mr Rowntree thanked the Chairman and Committee for the invitation; he recognised the work that all VAPCs do for veterans and their families, especially in Northern Ireland during what has been an extremely challenging period. Mr Rowntree welcomed the opportunity to speak with people and explain his role and that of SPVA. He took the opportunity to explain

- a. the reorganisation of SPVA

Mr Rowntree is one of two deputies of Jon Parkin, his focus is the operations side i.e. policy, AFPS and AFCS. The other deputy deals with welfare service and anything that doesn't fall within Mr Rowntree's side

- b. a bit about his background,

Having gone straight into the military from school, together with his experience as a Law graduate, work with global repatriation, the casualty centre and the medal office he has a wide experience to bring to his new role.

Future/

- c. Future challenges faced.

Many of the challenges relate to efficiency savings, however, the main challenge is dealing with the volume of work and quantity of claims. This increase in claims may be partly due to publicity surrounding the Boyce review.

They are currently working on developing a clearer terms and conditions for the AFCS, to identify what can be claimed and what can't. There is also a programme of education with medical officers so that they can better understand the process.

The new pension scheme is due to go live on 3<sup>rd</sup> June; while the scheme is not as generous as other schemes but when compared with what else is out there, it should be viewed as reasonable.

We are also in the process of developing a 'complex case team' where Glasgow and Norcross (Pension and Welfare) will work together to enable decisions to be made early, accurately and consistently.

#### **169. FUTURE GUEST SPEAKERS**

Irene Lyttle provided a number of suggestions and the Acting Chairman will source an available speaker from this list. Members should continue to send suggestions to the Acting Chairman.

#### **170. VETERANS WORLD**

Carolyn Arnold highlight the paucity of articles included from a Northern Ireland perspective. Carolyn will make further enquiries. Mr Rowntree noted the existence of the SPVA media team who were available to help.

#### **171. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Our previous Chairman, John Davies will join us after the meeting for lunch and his presentation; unfortunately Dorothy, his wife is unable to be present. Charlie Richardson and Amy Wall, past members of the Committee will also be present.

John Davies has agreed to meet with the new Chairman when an appointment is made.

Guy/

Guy McCullough reemphasised the impact that the welfare reform bill will have on veterans in NI; there is a real fear that when nit is complete there will be a major knock on effect.

#### **172. DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING**

**Thursday, 24<sup>th</sup> October 2013 at 11.00 p.m. TBC**

There being no further business the meeting closed at 12:45pm.

Distribution:

Northern Ireland VA&PC Members

Welfare Managers, VWS Belfast

VA&PC Focal Point, SPVA Norcross

Regional Manager Veterans Welfare Centre, Glasgow.

Appendix 1/

**WELFARE MANAGER –VWS BELFAST FOR NI VA&PC MEETING**

1. Both of the welfare managers continue to complete on average 25 – 30 visits to clients homes per month and the tempo of client visits has increased significantly since the beginning of Feb 13, and has no sign of reducing. This increase in visits is mainly due to the following:
  - The introduction of changes to the benefit system. Visits have increased to clients to change them over from ESA to ALSO/usurp or DLA to WPMS etc. Most of these clients are making direct contact through the helpline/Glasgow office and have not been referred from ex service organisations
  - Increased client visits from the serving community in relation to AFPS/medical discharging procedures have all increased especially from clients who are not part of the PRU process.
  - Increased client visits in relation to transition and PRU process. The last seminar for personnel discharging from the army held at Lisburn in Feb 13 significantly increased the number of client visits for AFCS due to the soldiers not being aware of AFCS. The next transition seminar will take place in June 13 at Lisburn and we can expect another batch of referrals, which will include personnel selected for redundancy in tranche 2.
  - Slight increase of visits to NRPS personnel being medically discharged.
2. Liaison with external ex service organisations within NI continues and we quite often refer clients to each other, We continue to attend the 28 day review meetings at the PRU in Lisburn, attend the transition working group meeting and seminars as arranged by 38 Bde, the next one arranged for 22 May 13. In addition although it is at a very early stage we also attend the Armed Forces Forum which in effect is a mini COBSEO, it has no TOR, aims or requirements listed as yet. However, it should be noted that to date there has been no representation from the Royal Navy/RM community; if it is to be successful then it needs to be fully joined up.
3. The business management team have put forward a proposal to the Defence Infrastructure Organisation to relocate the welfare managers and medical staff from Marlborough House to another central location within Belfast. We will keep you informed as this requirement progress regarding the locations and suitability from a security and access point of view.
4. Sue Turner and Brian Finch are visiting NI on 06 Jun 13, in order to hold a meeting with Brian Cassidy and the WM at Marlborough house regarding veterans issues in NI from SPVA perspective.
5. In conclusion, a busy period, with no let up on client visits and no doubt once the next phase of redundancies are issued, then an increase of referrals to clients regarding AFCS and AFPS.

Electronically Signed

Ben Higgins, BEM  
Welfare Manager  
21 May 13