

Gurkha Offer to Transfer: notes of a meeting in Main Building on 4 May 2006

Introduction

1. [REDACTED] (SP Pol Pensions) welcomed those present to the first meeting of the Gurkha OTT working group. Those present, below, were the main stakeholders in the project, but others would be invited to join:



SP Pol Pensions (Chair)
SP Pol Pensions
AFPAA project manager
AG Gurkha policy
PS10 (Army Pay and Pensions)
SP Pol Pensions

2. [REDACTED] confirmed that, although the final legal position was not yet agreed, it was clear that the Gurkha OTT would proceed. The precise terms of what would be offered would be defined when the final legal position was agreed. Meanwhile, it was important to begin planning the OTT, drawing on the recent experience for regulars and reserves, which was moving into its final phase, following the member transfer date of 6 April 2006. The purpose of this meeting was to have a first look at the nature and extent of the project; [REDACTED] notes for the meeting, circulated in advance, were used as a prompt for discussion and rough agenda.

3. AFPAA said that the Gurkha OTT would be part of the main OTT project, brought into being by a change control notice which would need to set out the terms of what was required. The current project board, chaired by [REDACTED], would therefore oversee the project, with the addition of [REDACTED] (tbc).

4. The main points made in discussion were:

- a. It would be helpful if HQ Brigade of Gurkhas (HQBG) was actively involved in the working party, lending its expertise in eg. communications with the Gurkhas, with outside lobby groups, like the veterans organisations, and with MPs (particularly MPs of constituencies with Gurkha personnel). The attachment of a Gurkha to SP Pol Pensions for the duration of the project made good sense. [REDACTED] would talk to [REDACTED] to enlist his support;
- b. [REDACTED] made clear that, in the context of the OTT, the terms and conditions of Gurkhas would not be changed. This meant that those on 15 year engagements would, if they transferred to AFPS 75 or AFPS 05, not get to the Immediate Pension (22 years) or Early Departure Payments (18 years) points respectively;
- c. One of the transfer terms to be finalised was the member transfer date (MTD). April 06 was attractive as it was the same as for the regulars, but a backward looking MTD created its own

problems, if, for example, an “event”, eg. a death, happened before the process was concluded. A MTD of April 07 was therefore more attractive. ■ said that a MTD of April 2007 fitted reasonably well with the announcement of the TACOS review, now delayed until the Autumn;

- d. A distinctive feature of this project was that the OTT would be extended to some former Gurkhas, including pensioners, and their dependants ■ said that it should not be difficult to track former Gurkhas, discharged to Nepal, through the systems run by HQBG. Some 2,000 had left service on or after 1 July 1997. Most would be in receipt of a Gurkha Pension Scheme (GPS) pension, as they would have served the required 15 years;
- e. There were a number of important differences between GPS and AFPS terms. These would need to be worked through carefully. SP Pol pensions would have first go at putting together a simple booklet to explain the main GPS terms, using the GPS manual. ■ would be closely involved in this. It also had some comparison tables (GPS and AFPS) which might be useful in this regard. ■ also undertook to provide a note of the different Gurkha engagements/commissions, as background;
- f. Personal data on the mainframe would need to be checked carefully prior to the launch of the exercise to ensure the accuracy of the information downloaded for the personal benefit statements (PBS). The Group was keen to avoid a repeat of the Army “green” issue, where inconsistencies in data held on the mainframe meant that revised PBSs had to be sent to Army personnel. This would be discussed at the workshop to be arranged by ■ for June;
- g. Comms would need to be worked through carefully, bearing in mind the two distinct groups involved (those serving, and those who have retired) using the expertise in HQBG. All the approaches used in the regular/reserves OTT should be considered, including booklets, newsletters, intranet/internet, radio/TV;
- h. It was agreed that Gurkhas would be briefed on a “face-to-face” basis, not through the chain of command. This would entail visits, probably of several days duration, to the areas in which they are based to do a number of briefing sessions. The aim was to have these sessions after Gurkhas had received their OTT information packs;
- i. Gurkha pensions are calculated in Indian rupees, not in sterling. For individuals paid in sterling, the conversion is done at a current exchange rate;
- j. Other details of the GPS: contracted in scheme, with a higher rate of NIC; pensions are calculated in whole years, with days disregarded; personnel with at least 5 years’ service were paid a gratuity, known as a resettlement grant, as part of their pension benefits; there were no added years or AVC facilities; condonation of service just before retirement allows ranks to count as pensionable up to 6 months’ and officers up to 12

months' service not actually given – to allow a smooth departure of personnel over a year. For OTT purposes, only pensionable service would count for transfer into AFPS;

- k. The costs of the OTT would be substantial. ██████ estimated its costs at around £150k. There would also be the cost of the publicity material and of the T&S for the briefing sessions. There would need to be further discussion about how these costs would be met;
- l. ██████ would explore with Thomsons the scope for modifying the pensions calculator to allow Gurkhas to do “what if” calculations.
- m. Those transferring into AFPS will need to have any AFCS award recalculated in the light of higher pension payments arising as a result.

5. The Group agreed it would meet regularly, probably on a monthly basis. The ██████ workshop in June would be an opportunity to take the debate forward.

SP POL PENSIONS