



EAST OF ENGLAND VETERANS ADVISORY AND PENSIONS COMMITTEE
(EVAPC)
MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD ON 5 JANUARY 2017 AT THE ARMY CADET
HEADQUARTERS, WATERBEACH, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Present: Mr JL Jelley – Chairman
Mr J Barnard
Mr MR Berry
Ms S Brenchley
Dr I Calder
Mr T Heslin
Ms P Kingham
Lt Cdr D Mincher
Maj T Ormiston
Mrs D Preston
Lt Col PK Robinson
Mr I Stewart
Lt Col R E Toland (Secretary)

Apologies: Rev SA Watts

Absent: Mrs K Green

In attendance: Mr S Burgess VWS

ITEM 1 - Welcome and Declarations of Interest

1. The meeting was opened at 10:30 by the Chairman. The Chairman welcomed a newly co-opted member, Ms P Kingham JP, to the meeting. Rev SA Watts, another newly co-opted member was unfortunately unable to attend. The Chairman also welcomed back, after a period of absence spent recovering from injuries sustained in a traffic accident, Dr I Calder.

2. There were no declarations of interest.

ITEM 2 – Minutes of the Meeting Held on 22 September 2016

3. Approval of Minutes. The Minutes, circulated to members prior to the meeting, were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

4. Matters Arising. There were no matters arising.

Action

ITEM 3 – Chairman’s Update

5. The Chairman reported on efforts to “reach out” to Local Authorities (LAs) and associated Covenant Boards around the East of England. Contact had been established with Essex’s Civil/Military Partnership Board as well as the already established membership of the Hertfordshire Covenant Board. However, much remained to be done to establish contacts with others around the region, in particular in Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire.

6. The Chairman had been contacted by Alex Cooper, head of the Veterans and Families Institute at Anglia Ruskin University who, with funding support from the Forces in Mind Trust (FIMT) was about to undertake a research project focused on veterans. The Chairman was to meet with Mr Cooper soon. Lt Col Robinson expressed his concerns that some academic studies around veterans’ issues produced little more than “glossy” reports. He also had concerns over the “targeting” of LIBOR funds. (*Afternote: in the case of FIMT, funding is from the Big Lottery Fund not LIBOR fines*) The Chairman noted these points but observed that whilst VAPCs were unable to influence funding decisions, they should be prepared to use the reports emanating from such studies in a judicious way to support their own work.

7. Mention was made of a study commissioned by London VAPC, undertaken by Kent University into homelessness amongst veterans in London. The report had concluded that of the 33 London Boroughs only 9 made any reference to homeless veterans. Ms Brenchley said that she had heard of an estimate by the Salvation Army that around 50% of the homeless in Cambridge were veterans. Lt Col Robinson commented that some housing associations and social services personnel were somewhat “resistant” to giving veterans any priority over other needy groups for housing. The Chairman noted that this item had not strayed into the next item on the Strategic Plan.

ITEM 4 – Strategic Plan

8. The Chairman proposed that progress against the Strategic Plan should be considered at all future meetings, to which there was general agreement.

9. The preceding discussion around veterans’ homelessness and housing needs falls firmly into the first objective in the Strategic Plan; to assist veterans to move into civilian life and a significant part of this transition is housing. Ms Brenchley asked if it would be possible for the MOD estate, i.e. vacant married quarters and barrack blocks to be used for accommodating homeless veterans? It was pointed out that the MOD had transferred its married quarters to the private sector some years ago and vacant barracks were being disposed of for development.

10. Lt Cdr Mincher suggested that the EVAPC contact each Covenant

Board in the region in order to ascertain what problems they had identified in relation to housing veterans, with a view to EVAPC assisting in finding answers. Ms Kingham noted that the Herts Covenant Board did identify veterans in their housing applications but appeared not to make use of the data. Mr Barnard asked if it was known what funding each of the regions Covenant Boards received each year? Lt Cdr Mincher volunteered to find out and let members know.

Lt Cdr
Mincher

11. The Chairman suggested that in view of the complexity of this whole subject it would be perhaps wise to target a particular area and he proposed focussing on Cambridge city which, reportedly, had an issue with homeless veterans. Lt Col Robinson volunteered to approach the University of East Anglia to enquire if they would be willing to look at homelessness amongst veterans in Norfolk. The Chairman responded by suggesting that, in view of current lack of knowledge about the situation across the region, the committee focuses its efforts in one area and he favoured Cambridge. Ms Brenchley volunteered to use her contacts with the Rotarions in Cambridge, who have some data, to obtain some better information about the scale of any problem and forward to the Chairman. The Chairman summarised the way ahead as obtaining evidence of any problem in Cambridge around veterans' homelessness in order to devise an action plan to engage with Cambridgeshire Covenant Board to resolve any issues emerging.

Ms
Brenchley

12. Lt Col Robinson commented that in the past (pre-Covenant) LAs were legally required to take into account the length of military service when calculating the points assessments used for allocating housing. This legal requirement no longer existed and had been replaced by the "woolly" wording in the Covenant. He was firmly of the view that this legal requirement should be reinstated in legislation and that Veterans UK should be lobbying Government on this matter. The Chairman took note and said that this matter would be addressed in due course once the results of the work around Cambridge had been completed.

ITEM 5 – Membership and Recruitment

13. The Chairman reported positive news on recruitment. In addition to the three new co-opted members, the Veterans UK recruitment drive had produced another seven applicants. All 10 would be interviewed within the next few weeks. If all are successful the EVAPC will have a much improved spread across the region.

ITEM 6 – Hertfordshire Covenant Board Meeting

14. Ms Kingham had represented the EVAPC at this meeting on 6 Dec 16. A large meeting of clearly well-meaning people, however this particular meeting produced little in the way of action, with most of the time given over to reporting on a national conference of the LGA and it was clear that nationally there were very disparate expectations around Covenants. Mr Stewart, who had attended previous meetings

commented that they had been more productive.

ITEM 7 – VWS Activity Report

15. Mr Burgess briefed the meeting on VWS activities over the past quarter. A copy of his presentation is attached.

16. The Chairman expressed the thanks to Mr Burgess and the staff of VWS Kidderminster who are working very hard to provide a service during a period of staff shortages.

ITEM 8 – Any Other Business

17. Mr Berry reported on his attendance at the Suffolk Covenant Board’s annual conference. Organised by the County Council the Covenant appeared be an effective enterprise,

18. Ms Kingham, in her role as a JP, noted that of those people diverted through the Liaison and Diversion Service from appearing before the Bench some 6% were veterans. It was noted that Ms Brenchley had been appointed the magistrate member on the Liaison and Diversion Service Board.

19. Lt Cdr Mincher asked whether VAPCs had a position on the activities of Iraq Historic Allegations Team and investigations into alleged offences by members of the military in Northern Ireland. The Chairman agreed to discuss with UK Veterans (Mr Goudie).

Chairman

20. Lt Cdr Mincher showed the committee an assessment aid used by the Officers’ Association and based on themed “rays” of a star used to assess what areas and to what extent a client needed assistant and/or support. It was suggested a similar approach could be useful for EVAPC. Mrs D Preston observed that while it had potential, it nevertheless relied on the subjective views of the recorder.

21. The Chairman said that at the recent VAPC Chairs’ meeting at York he had noted very divergent views amongst Chairs on the effectiveness of VAPCs. However, it was pleasing to note that EVAPC’s profile is now on the rise.

ITEM 10 – Date of Next Meeting

22. The Secretary to consult members and arrange a date in January 2017.

Signed:

Chairman.....Date.....

VWS REPORT TO EVAPC – 5 JAN 17

Staffing

The staffing situation in the region has become a little difficult since our last meeting. Sue Hicks who worked at the Personnel Recovery Centre (PRC) has gone to work for the Army Welfare Service at Colchester Garrison. At this stage there are to plans to replace Sue so Lisa Bracher will be doing the work at the PRC and also still attending weekly group sessions at MCTC. She will not therefore have the time to do visits in and around the Colchester/Essex area. We have arranged for a Welfare Manager from the London area to cover the south of Essex and I will cover Colchester and north of Colchester.

I told you last time that we had managed to recruit a new member of staff who was going to work out of Bramcote Barracks. The lady eventually joined us at the end of November but after two weeks of training she decided that the role was not for here so she has now left the post. Unfortunately, due to restrictions on recruitment we are not sure at this stage whether the post will be re-advertised.

We have advertised for two new post, one to be based at Wyton where Sue Howson was and one at RAF Cosford where another WM has recently left to go to the Army Welfare Service in Belgium.

On a positive note the centre in Kidderminster is now fully staffed and that has meant that they are able to take some of the workload from the WMs.

Statistically we are still managing to keep a high level of work. In November the centre received 611 phone calls of which 421 were referred on to the relevant WM and of these referrals 36% resulted in a home visit. On average the time taken to visit from referral was 8.15 days. We also saw 115 clients at advice days so a total of 536 clients were dealt with of which 167 claim forms were completed.

Stuart Burgess