



**EAST OF ENGLAND VETERANS ADVISORY AND PENSIONS COMMITTEE**  
**(EVAPC)**  
**MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD ON 17 SEPTEMBER 2015 AT THE ARMY**  
**CADET HEADQUARTERS, WATERBEACH, CAMBRIDGESHIRE**

Present: Mr JL Jelley – Chairman  
Mr AJ Barnard  
Mr MR Berry  
Mrs K Green  
Mr T Heslin  
Mrs D Preston  
Lt Col PK Robinson  
Mr I Stewart  
Lt Col R E Toland (Secretary)

In Attendance: Mr R Rowntree, Veterans UK

Apologies: Maj T Ormiston

Absent: Dr IM Calder  
Mrs J Logan (Co-opted Member)

**ITEM 1 - Welcome and Declarations of Interest**

1. The meeting was opened at 10:30 by the Chairman. The Chairman welcomed Mr Rob Rowntree, Veterans UK Deputy Head Welfare and Support. There was no representation from the VWS as Ms Sue Howson had been posted on promotion and Mr Stuart Burgess had a previous engagement. The Chairman offered the committee's congratulations to Ms Howson on her promotion. Mrs Logan, a co-opted member, had not responded to any e mails sent to her and it was agreed that the Secretary would write once more enquiring if she wished to continue her association with the EVAPC.

**Action**

2. There were no declarations of interest.

Secretary

**ITEM 2 – Minutes of the Meeting Held on 30 April 2015**

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

4. **Matters Arising.** There were no matters arising.

### **ITEM 3 – Chairman’s Update**

5. The Chairman observed that it had been some time since the last meeting. Whilst there had been no major developments since then, the Chairman was hopeful that after today’s briefing by Mr Rowntree, a clear way forward would emerge as to the role and function of EVAPC and thus enable the committee to devise a strategy for the future. Whilst the development of a communication strategy was contingent on the emergence of an overall strategic plan, the Chairman had nevertheless made a start on publicising the existence of the EVAPC and had written to all six Lord Lieutenants in the region. All had responded positively except for the Lord Lieutenant of Essex who had not replied.

### **ITEM 4 – Veterans UK Briefing**

#### **Introduction**

6. Mr Rowntree began his briefing by committing himself and Veterans UK to supporting the VAPCs, but he stressed that that support must not be seen as Veterans UK attempting to interfere in any way with the independence of the VAPCs.

#### **Veterans UK Business Overview**

7. Mr Rowntree described the roles and structure of Veterans UK within Defence Business Services (DBS), its ongoing business and the challenges that may emerge from the next Strategic Defence Review. The department was very busy running AFPS, AFCS, the WPS and its four regional Veterans Welfare Service offices and the Polish Home. A significant challenge for the department was to process claims in a timely manner, and whilst there was a high level of claims the department was achieving its best settlement rate for 4 or more years. The implementation of AFPS 15 had brought with it a major workload to ensure the correct transfer of benefits for those covered by earlier schemes. There had been concerns raised about inconsistencies between the various parts of DBS and “cross-team” working had been introduced to help eliminate any inconsistency in approach to cases. DBS was also working to improve links with the Third Sector and to that end the VWS was using the British Legion’s “pop-in” centres to contact veterans. The DBS web site would also provide links to Third Sector sites and establish a single point web site for veterans. With regard to Veterans UK performance against targets, Mr Rowntree offered to provide the committee with a copy of their monthly statistical report. *(Afternote: The Secretary to pursue with Veterans UK.)*

Secretary

#### **VAPCs**

9. Mr Rowntree said that he had now visited five or six VAPCs and whilst some were clear in what they were trying to achieve, others were suffering from a lack of clarity of purpose which appears to have

emerged with the demise of the erstwhile War Pensions Committees and their re-establishment as VAPCs. In an attempt to assist VAPCs to formulate their aims and objectives Mr Rowntree said that he would firstly give details of training to be provided for Chairmen and members and secondly make suggestions as to functions and actions that EVAPC might like to consider, bearing in mind the need to ensure that the independence of the committee was not prejudiced in any way by this support.

10. It was intended to run a training day for Chairmen at Norcross on 12 October 2015. This would provide an over-view of the various schemes, a briefing by the Covenant team from London and a tour of Norcross. A members' training day was planned for 26 November 2015 at Imjin Barracks, Gloucester. Further details are to follow.

11. With regard to VAPC activities Mr Rowntree suggested that while some Local Authorities (LA) were very active, others were paying lip-service to the Military Covenant, with some Councillors seeing it as no more than a "photo opportunity". The EVAPC could take a lead here by providing information on veterans' matters to LAs, and disseminating examples of Covenant best practice by LAs. LA "Armed Forces Champions" could be invited to EVAPC meetings and EVAPC could itself become involved with the veterans' welfare activities of their local Armed Forces Headquarters. The supervision of the VWS was an important matter for all VAPCs and members could, subject to proper prior agreement, accompany VWS staff on welfare visits. Veterans UK is committed to providing up to date publicity material, which EVAPC could use to link into Regional activities such as Armed Forces Days.

12. The Chairman thanked Mr Rowntree for his very useful briefing and noted that this would help in the drafting of an EVAPC Strategic Plan and Communication strategy. The Chairman agreed to provide a draft for consideration by the committee.

Chairman

#### **Item 5 – VWS Update**

13. A written update prepared by Mr S Burgess, VWS, was circulated to members at the meeting.

#### **Item 6 – Any Other Business**

14. It was agreed that in view of the anticipated increase in EVAPC business and activities, additional members would be needed to bring the committee back to its previous strength; that is, 16 to 18 members. The Secretary would liaise with the Chairman to progress this matter.

Secretary

15. Mr Barnard drew attention to the publicity around the case of Sergeant Blackman, the Royal Marine imprisoned for murdering a Taliban terrorist. Whilst recognising the controversial nature of this case the Chairman remarked that it was not a matter within the purview of the

EVAPC. Mr Barnard said that his concern was that the Mrs Blackman was being properly supported by the MOD and receiving all to which she was entitled.

16. Mr Berry reported that he had attended Castle Point's Armed Services Day on 22 June 2015. It was a very well organised event and he had been impressed by the Service and ex-Service people that he met.

*(Afternote: Mr J Barnard also attended this event as the official representative of the EVAPC. Recognising that many EVAPC members also have other roles, e.g. Officers' Association, SSAFA, RBL etc, it would be helpful, if intending to attend events such as Armed Forces Days, they would let the Chairman and Secretary know beforehand.)*

All

17. Mr Rowntree commented that the VAPC web-site was looking for articles from VAPCs about their activities, or any other item of interest. The deadline for submission was 1 October 2015. Chairman agreed to write and submit an appropriate article.

Chairman

**Item 7 – Date of Next Meeting**

18. The Secretary to consult members and arrange a date in early December 2015 after the members' training day.

Secretary

Signed:

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