

MINUTES OF THE FIFTEENTH MEETING OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND VETERANS ADVISORY AND PENSIONS COMMITTEE HELD AT HQ 38 (IRISH) BDE, THIEPVAL BARRACKS, LISBURN ON FRIDAY 4th SEPTEMBER 2015 AT 12 NOON

PRESENT

Adrian Donaldson, (Chairman), Mary Moreland (Secretary), Mitch Bresland, Iain Creswell, John Dunbar, Ivan Grainger, Philip Hamilton Irene Lyttle, Guy McCullough, Oliver McCullough, Norman Walker, Peter Baillie, Peter Johnston, Ron Kenning.

APOLOGIES

Carolyn Arnold, William Ball, Robert Gillespie, Nicholas Purkis,

IN ATTENDANCE

Maj Gavin Hendrie, SO2 Pers Sp/Ops Pol HQ 38 (Irish) Bde

Jon Parkin, Head of DBS- Veterans UK.

211. WELCOME, INTRODUCTION AND OPENING REMARKS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the 15th meeting of the NIVAPC; he extended special thanks to Col Mike Murdoch, DComd 38 (Irish) Bde for agreeing to host our lunch and meeting, to Maj Gavin Hendrie, SO2 Pers Sp/Ops Pol HQ 38 (Irish) Bde for making the arrangements. The Chairman welcomed new members Peter Bailie, Peter Johnston, and Ron Kenning. The Chairman reported that members Mitch Bresland and William Ball have been granted 3-month extensions by the Minister, pending completion of the VA&PC Triennial review.

John/

John Dunbar who is due to retire from the committee has agreed to continue for a period of one year, subject to Ministerial approval. On behalf of the Committee the Chairman welcomed Jon Parkin, Head of DBS- Veterans UK.

212. APOLOGIES

Apologies were noted

213. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

None

214. MINUTES OF THE 14th MEETING HELD 12th February 2015

Minutes of the 14th Meeting held on 12th February 2015 were agreed having been proposed by Philip Hamilton and Seconded by Oliver McCullough

215. MATTERS ARISING

None

216. PRESENTATION BY THE NORTHERN IRELAND PERSONNEL RECOVERY UNIT (PRU)

Maj Gavin Hendrie, delivered PRU's PowerPoint presentation. The presentation provided members with a detailed overview of PRU's and PRC's. They provide a very important cog in the wheel of managing the service individuals recovery and where necessary managing their transition for return to service or to civilian life. The PRU is not limited to field of conflict trauma; it also includes cases of 'natural' illness. It was noted that PRU's are accessible by veterans.

217. REPORT BY THE VETERANS UK WELFARE SERVICE WELFARE OFFICER

See 221

218. UPDATE FROM NI VETERANS' SUPPORT COMMITTEE

The last meeting of the NI Veterans' Support Committee was February 2015; this was an AGM style meeting. The next meeting is scheduled for 24th September 2015 at RFCA and will be attended by only the core members.

The NI Veterans' Support Committee is officially recognised by COBSEO and MOD Covenant Team but apart from Terms of Reference, it remains a loose coalition, entirely dependent on goodwill of constituent members, which includes VAPC. Some frictions have still to be overcome for example eligibility to attend.

It is linked to political activity such as AF Champions within 11 Councils but should defer to RFCA and individual engagement. The committee has no resources, budget or voice, although latter is being addressed. In the absence of anything else the Committee is reasonably effective. Its outputs include production and distribution of the NI Veterans' Handbook and FiMT-funded academic research project.

219. UPDATE ON ARMED FORCES LIAISON FORUM

The Armed Forces Liaison Forum was created as a Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, (DHSSPS) protocol, triggered by this VAPC, but now also focussed on in-Service contracts for MOD e.g. APHCS. It retains a significant veterans' component but essentially cannot condone any assumption that the NHS is a hostile environment. With effect from 2014 there is now also a 6 monthly strategic meeting between 38X/DPHC. The forum could be perceived as a box-ticking exercise to meet UKHD/MOD partnership requirements; however, there is a useful list of 'points of contact' within each of the Health Trusts.

220. UPDATE ON FORCES IN MIND TRUST FUNDING FOR A REVIEW OF SUPPORT TO VETERANS IN NI

The project was approved in July with a press release in August. FiMT will

fund Ulster University's application; in essence the programme will seek to provide empirical evidence of the issues affecting the veterans' community and make recommendations for improvement, where necessary.

The research team will shortly explain its planned engagement for each aspect of the programme and will seek to work with all statutory and voluntary agencies, as well as individual veterans and their families. NIVSC members will have the opportunity to engage fully in every aspect. The intention is to conduct six discrete Work Packages over the course of a three year programme, commencing in autumn 2015.

221. PRESENTATION/UPDATE ON DBS VETERANS UK AND CURRENT VETERANS' ISSUES

Jon Parkin, Head of DBS- Veterans UK, provided a comprehensive overview of their services and performance. The service has demonstrated improved performance and is meeting their KPI targets for the welfare service. Jon agreed to provide a copy of the detailed stakeholder brief once updated, he will email separately. A few of the major points noted are listed below:

- Target to clear AFCS cases is 90 days, during July and August completion was at 68 working days.
- War Pensions. The number of cases are not showing a decline with 5,000 being received in the first 3 months. The average is 105 days to completion, currently concentrating on older cases. It is a rapidly improving picture,
- The new AFP 2015 aim is 20 working days to completion, this is difficult, but we are achieving this;
- Phasing out of Post-Office card accounts;
- Currently there is no queue to see medical advisors, or with payments which usually happen within 24 hours of decision;
- National Security Vetting will remain in the public sector;

Examining/

- Examining the services and investigating what can/should be kept in house and what can/should be outsourced,

A wide-ranging Q&A session followed allowing members to clarify issues of concern. The Chairman thanked Jon Parkin, for taking time out of his busy schedule to attend the NI VA&PC meeting and providing a very comprehensive and interesting overview.

222. VETERANS SEMINAR IN RBL ANTRIM ON 10TH SEPTEMBER 2015

Representation from NI VA&PC will include the Chairman and Carolyn Arnold. Ben Higgins will also attend.

223. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Serving soldiers do not fall within the brief of the VA&PC, however it was noted that a high number of suicides had been reported amongst serving Royal Irish returning from the last Afghanistan conflict. It is therefore important to maintain a watching brief.

224. DATE/TIME/VENUE OF FUTURE MEETING

TBA

There being no further business the meeting closed at 15:10PM.

Distribution:

Northern Ireland VA&PC Members

Welfare Managers, VWS Belfast

VA&PC Focal Point, SPVA Norcross

Regional Manager Veterans Welfare Centre, Glasgow.