

## VETERANS ADVISORY AND PENSIONS (VAPC) COMMITTEE – Annual Activity Report dated ... 2 August 2017.....

### Annual Report from .....Yorkshire & Humber (Y&H).....Committee

#### Achievement against VAPC Objectives

##### Membership

*See enclosed list. There has been one resignation this year due to pressure of that members other work and family commitments, and have recruited one new Member, leaving us with 15 Members, 4 Co-Opted Members and 5 x vacancies against the authorised head room of 20 Members. Our new Member is a serving Army Officer, which we believe is a significant mark.*

##### Raising awareness activity

*Through all our 22 x Local Authority (LA) Armed Forces Forums (AFF) Y&H VAPC Members attend we always ensure that both our role and that of Veterans UK and their VWS is known and exposed, promoting it to specific others when relevant individual cases are appropriate. In addition because we are trusted advocates we were asked to lead on 2 x regional Armed Forces Covenant (AF Cov) related events drawing a large, broad audience from across our region, we have had significant opportunity to advocate and raise awareness both for perception management and policy issues as well as ensuring the role of both VAPCs and Veterans UK is understood. Our advocacy and advice has resulted in several LAs building AF profiles within their AF Cov related websites to demonstrate consideration and inclusivity as well as generate trust and access. We have also been instrumental in encouraging and advising all 22 x LAs in promoting a specific AF/Veterans page within their council websites and we will continue to identify those we believe have best practice and advocate it to others. Y&H VAPC have specifically ensured the SSVC AF Cov media lead has been connected to several of our largest urban LAs in order to assist promoting their AF Day events and support and we have advised closely several other LAs in developing directories of local services available to veterans as well as ensuring that all they do dove-tails with national initiatives such as the Veterans Gateway.*

##### Engagement

*We have continued to engage well across the AF Cov landscape; a VAPC member attends every LA AF Cov forum which are generally held quarterly in all of our 22 x LAs. In addition we are welcomed as a core member of the NHS Armed Forces Network as well as related forums of HQ 4 Mechanised Brigade and North East (HQ 4 Mech Bde & NE), our regional MoD AF Cov lead based in Catterick. Our standing, reflecting the respect in which our contribution as an independent agent is valued, is clearly demonstrated in that we were asked to take a prominent lead for 2 LA AF Cov seminars (Hull and Leeds) promoting and encouraging cross LA boundary best practice that were attended by significant numbers drawn from across our whole region. As well as providing support to LAs, contributing to the AF Cov agenda, this has also enabled us to cement our reputation across myriad agencies, charities, social support, veteran's organisations and individuals as well as promote Veterans UK and their VWS. In addition our VAPC opinion is sought by all 22 x LAs on their AF Cov fund bids and we are official members of 2 formal boards that consider collaborative bids for 8 x LAs as well as being a core strategic member of the Board in HQ 4 Mech Bde and NE who are MoDs AF Cov fund lead to assess bids for all LAs in the North East. It is not vain to say our guidance & advice was key in the success of many bids - particularly advising on 2 major successful, collaborative bids<sup>12</sup> involving 9 x LAs). Such bids are clearly influenced by AF Cov central priorities, but the partnership necessary to reach consensus between diverse LAs should not be under estimated and again it is plain that Y&H*

<sup>1</sup> Hull, East Riding, North East Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire and Doncaster successful priority 3, strengthening partnerships with the councils working collaboratively - grant is for £480,000 over 2 years.

<sup>2</sup> Sheffield, Barnsley, Rotherham and Doncaster Councils. The research is being led by Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) and the training by York St John University - grant is for £180k over two years.

VAPC encouragement and sponsorship was instrumental in generating the impetus & trust to do so. Several Y&H VAPC members are also members of the regional Reserve Forces and Cadets Association (RFCA), which has a veterans support strand and allows us a significant formal and informal influence opportunity with a broad range of stakeholders. This is particularly pertinent for veterans who might be affected by the business community and employers under the RFCA Employer Engagement mandate, which comes under MoDs Defence Relationship Management. Over Armed Forces Day we also jointly provided representation at 5 x LA AF Cov events.

### Assistance to Veterans

We have provided direct support to 2 x individuals: there were complex needs that involved several other LA and charity agencies and through the intervention of Y&H VAPC member the veteran in both cases was assisted to a better, safer and more secure place than they had been. Indeed, in one case a diversion from the criminal justice system was assisted. In addition our position as a recognised independent advocate has been recognised in that we have been requested to assist a LA and a National veteran's organisation address a falling out with a view to working together for the benefit of veterans. This is ongoing, and likely to be so for a while, and so results not yet available.

### Veterans Welfare Service Engagement activity

Veterans UK VWS representative attends every VAPC Committee meeting for a standing agenda item about service delivery in our region, where trends and actions are discussed, especially where VAPCs might assist in perception management, myth busting and individual support. Time is focused well as VWS provide a written report in advance of meetings so discussion is effectively prioritised on the real issues. This has been underpinned by 2 accompanied visits completed jointly; while this might seem a low number against our (self-imposed) target of 5 visits we recently held a very productive, positive meeting with our VWS Regional Manager to discuss identified factors affecting that and will take this forward in a proposed amendment to the VAPC Members Handbook guidance that we believe will drive best practice and surmount issues.

### Consultation

We have contributed as follows:

- **Our Community Our Covenant - 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition:** FiMT/LGA consultation on developing initial study/report about LAs delivery of AF Cov. Y&H VAPC contributed both in writing and at consultation event at Sheffield Hallam University.
- **Right Turn Report:** Veterans transitioning justice and addictions systems – Helena Kennedy Centre research on behalf of Addaction, funded by FiMT. Y&H VAPC contributed both in writing and at consultation event at Sheffield Hallam University.
- **The Military Human** – York St John's University formal CPD<sup>3</sup> training in understanding veterans and AF community: Y&H VAPC contributed to development of course material. This course is mandated CPD for NHS in Y&H and others.
- **Independent Medical Expert Group:** Y&H sent a representative to the Stakeholder Consultation on AFCS.
- **NHS E-Learning Packages:** Y&H VAPC contributed written and consultation comments to assist the development of veterans and AF community e-learning package through CCG Y&H, who are AF lead.
- **LA Armed Forces Profiles:** Y&H VAPC assisted 8 x LAs in developing AF community profiles within their Council websites.
- **NHS Mental Health Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service:** Y&H VAPC contributed comments regarding potential user needs for this new service through the regional CCG AF lead.

<sup>3</sup> Continuous Personal Development.

## Other activity

**LA Seminar to Explore Issues and Share Best Practice:** Last year Y&H VAPC Members consulted widely across all LAs in our region and produced a comprehensive report about application of the AF Cov. This was shared with all participants (only 2 x LA did not contribute/join the consultation) with a view to exposing best practice and encouraging sharing of it. To provide a catalyst for action, build upon that report and tie it in with the FiMT/LGA “Our Community – Our Covenant” Report, this year Y&H VAPC organised a seminar to offer Y&H LAs an opportunity to explore initiatives, where candid views could be exchanged to set foundations for subsequent formal collaboration in accordance with AF Cov intent as well as provide a platform to present MoD and LGA with informed opinion. The event was organised around 4 x workshops to provide a framework to address fundamental issues:

- 4 x workshop:
  - Health: Physical v mental, evidence, numbers, connecting Public Health.
  - Housing: Is there an issue? Homelessness, Evidence.
  - Social: Are services connected, Social Isolation, Financial/Debt.
  - Education/Training: Skills for employment, motivation and wellbeing.
- With a view to:
  - Share initiatives and action plans implemented – Best Practice.
  - Explore gaps and evidence based needs across the region.
  - Explore effective use of resources, including sharing.
  - Facilitate collaboration to encourage uniform regional solutions.
  - Identifying what messages to send back to MoD/AF Cov Team/LGA.

That 20 of 22 LAs participated, that York St John’s University provided support and a venue free of charge and that several other charities and agencies, including the NHS, HQ 4 Mech Bde and NE and academic institutions provided participants says a lot about the appetite for sharing best practice. But it was also very clear that it was only the reputation of Y&H VAPC as an independent advocate in the region that generated the trust for LAs to send participants to engage in such a frank and open debate and high level of participation. A formal report is pending.

## Plans for next year

We have a clear focus for next year as follows:

- **Health:** To engage GP Practices as recognised choke points in our region with a view to improving veterans accessibility to their service by assisting them shape services veterans will be more comfortable accessing and improve identification of veterans and their conditions in order to enable NHS CCGs responsible for allocating funds to more effectively target resources to their evidence based needs.
- **Welfare:** To propose, develop and implement amended protocols for collaborating with Veterans UK VWS to improve execution of joint visits as part of our formal mandate to monitor as well as propose reporting formats in order to focus resulting reports more applicably.
- **Engagement:** To build on excellent external networks already secured to take forward agreed best practice exposed by LA Seminar we organised and assist LAs work on collaborative solutions. In addition make a concerted effort to engage grass roots veterans, to identify what they perceive issues to be, map that against what others believe issues to be and tackle inconsistencies through developing a perception management strategy. It will also flush out inconsistencies where we will develop a regional position, seeking the necessary evidence and advocating the joint approach to make potential policy proposals or suggestions to Minister, MoD and Veterans UK.

**Other key points**

*Y&H VAPC were closely engaged in advising and assisting with 2 x social proposals regarding veterans in West and South Yorkshire; the former regarding homelessness and the latter regarding support to older veterans (over 65 years old) – on both we were able to advocate the evidence based needs, ensure the MoD position and support was clear, provide the proposer with other contacts already tackling similar concerns in our region (and beyond) as a source of best practice and intelligence, advise on bidding for AF Cov/LIBOR funds and on collaborating with others. In addition we have been engaged for advice by Project NOVA, seeking to address concerns about transition of veterans in the criminal justice system, which has great synergy with our involvement in the consultation reported above on the Right Turn Report. Members of Y&H VAPC also advised on a financial inclusion forum for Humberside (involving 4 x LAs collaborating) specifically regarding veterans issues.*

*This is an important point as it clearly demonstrates that AF Cov intent is starting to have a positive impact on generating the necessary collaboration and consultation to “join the dots” as well as the central role VAPCs can play in both encouraging and facilitating such jointery as well as being able to contribute significantly to the debate as independent advocates explaining government policy and “busting myths”.*

**Signed:** *Original Signed* **AW PHILLIPS**