



## **SOCIAL SECURITY ACT 1989**

### **SOUTH EAST VETERANS ADVISORY AND PENSIONS COMMITTEE**

#### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 7 FEBRUARY 2018 AT CASTAWAY HOUSE GOSPORT**

#### **PRESENT:**

Canon P Bruinvels – Deputy Chairman  
Mrs L Gannon – Secretary  
Ms K Fryatt  
Mr T Roper  
Mr P Bateman  
Mr R Draper  
Mr J Williams  
Mr I Talbot

#### **1. Welcome**

Mr Bruinvels welcomed attendees, and gave an update on his meeting with Col Simon Brown, who wanted Task Force Commanders to be more involved with Armed Forces Champions.

He also said that he would very shortly be holding interviews for new members to be selected.

He said that he had received a weekly newsletter from John Parkin, with information on the Centenary of the War Pensions Act, which he would send out to members.

#### **2. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Mr K Newton, Mr M Robjohn, Mr W Gillett, Mrs S Smith, Mr A Olson.

#### **3. Declaration of Interest**

The Chairman reiterated that if any matter under consideration encroached on a member personally, financially or politically, it must be declared.

#### **4. New Chairman's Forward Plan**

Mr Bruinvels said that he had asked Kate Fryatt to look at as a fresh pair of eyes and she had come up with some interesting questions, such as who do we represent and how do we report back? It was felt that a Veterans Champion should be appointed to be more involved with the communities. The Chairman said that we need to be more proactive and fit for purpose.

Mr Draper said that we need to prioritise looking after veterans and pension enquiries, as Norcross are so far behind with enquiries, which wasn't acceptable, and would like this mentioned at the forthcoming Chairman's Conference.

## **5. Membership of SEVA&PC**

The Deputy Chairman said that he was conducting a sift through 14 applications with an independent person later in the day.

## **6. Briefing on SSAFA – Mr Talbot**

Mr Talbot gave a very comprehensive and interesting brief on the work conducted by SSAFA, highlighting the issues tackled and the challenges still to be faced.

## **7. Forces Connect South East**

The Deputy Chairman said that there had been a brief report before and he highlighted items in the paper. He felt that all committee members should be in contact with their local council, to make them aware of who we are and what we can do. An online app was being produced for online training for AF Champions.

## **8. Membership of CMP Boards**

The deputy Chairman said that he felt we should be on local boards, and urged committee members to write in and ask to be co-opted onto CMP Boards. He agreed to produce a letter of recommendation if members required one.

## **9. Update from RWM**

The Secretary read out the report from the RWM, who was unable to attend the meeting:

“During the last quarter we have had three new Welfare Managers take up post in the Region; Sandra Cromwell who will be based at Shorncliffe (covering SE Kent), Rachael Sargeant based at Wyvern Barracks Exeter (covering Torbay/N Devon) and Carole Woods based at Merville Barracks Colchester (covering Essex). We have another Welfare Manager imminently arriving for the Plymouth Area. Also adverts out for a Gosport based Welfare Manager and another for South London, which when recruited will bring us back to full strength.

We have had a new Welfare Advisor arrive in Centurion to bring us back to 2 in post with a third to follow at a later date.

The Welfare Service will be getting new telephony equipment in March, as the current system is unreliable and subject to frequent breakdown. This will mean a single point of access for all Veterans using the Freephone number currently available for Veterans Helpline, but expanded to include the Welfare Service.

I cannot give you an update on processing times for claims at Norcross, as Russ Egan who was our POC at Norcross has moved on to pastures new and his replacement only started last week and is currently under training.

Both Mr Draper and Mr Bateman said that they thought the committee needed more contact with the VWS Managers

**10. DDS Publicity**

**11. Richard Benyons Bill & March**

Mr Roper said that he had been working hard in his own area to get businesses to offer discounts to Veterans, and, despite contacting DDS, had received no reply. He had copied his letter to the Minister. The Deputy Chairman said that the Veterans gateway has done a deal, but would bring it up at the Chairman's Conference.

Mr Roper felt very strongly that we should be supporting it, to stop 'ambulance chasers'. It was agreed that individuals could do this but not as a committee venture.

**12. Homeless Veterans**

Mr Roper said that the figures were high and needed addressing rapidly, and said that he thought Housing Officers were anti Military. The Deputy Chairman said that Forces South East would help this issue. Mr Roper said that Oxford CC has set up a committee to work with homeless personnel and he had been co-opted onto the committee.

Mr Thomas felt that the Covenant perception was wrong – no automatic housing etc, and our region has very high house prices and rentals, which doesn't help the situation.

**13. Members Reports**

Mr Bateman said that, in his role as a local councillor, he had gone out on the streets in the evenings and had met some homeless people – some wanted help, some refused it, which made the work even more difficult

Mr Thomas said that links with the local police was also important.

Mr Draper said that he had handed over the Oxford Forum to Mr Thomas. He also said that he currently had 4 appeals on the go.

**14. Any Other Business**

Mr Thomas said that there were so many charities available for help, and that the Government and COBSEO needed to be linked in.

**15. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will take place on Wednesday 2 May 2018 – venue tbc