

# South West Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committee:

Minutes of Meeting held at 11:30 hours on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2018  
at The Rifles – Taunton Branch

## Members Present:

Simon Reed (Chairman)  
Ben Bennington  
Tom Coyle  
Keith Naylor  
Franklin Owusu–Antwi  
Scott Porter  
Heather Smith  
Jeff Spencer  
Steve Roland–Jones  
Steven Turnbull  
Irene Wills  
John Yerbury

## Apologies:

Chris Francis  
Philip Heavey  
Ash Jones  
David Newson  
Sarah Stevenson

## Co-opted Apologies:

VWS, Vets UK: Dave Luscombe

1. **Welcome and Introduction.** The Chairman, Simon Reed (SR), extended a welcome to everybody present but particularly to Stephen Rowland–Jones, whose first meeting this was. SR was also indebted to John Yerbury (JY) for his assistance in compiling the minutes for the meeting.

2. **SW VAPC Chairman – Update:**

a. The key issue to inform the meeting about was that a decision had been made on formal appointment of a Chairman. To SR's keen disappointment and intense chagrin, he announced that he had not been selected. Veterans UK had someone – 10 year's younger and more senior – in mind, and were putting his name to the Minister, the Rt Hon Tobias Ellwood MP, for authorisation. SR did not know when the newly appointed Chairman or SW VAPC would be advised of the outcome – but he presumed they would hear formally sometime later in September.

b. The only other point to update the meeting on was the briefing of Conservative MPs from the south west, which took place in Committee Room 20 in the Houses of Parliament in Westminster. SR and Jeff Spencer (JS) had met up with Johnny Mercer MP in Portcullis House, who had escorted them across to the Palace of Westminster, where SR and JS briefed the MPs who attended about VAPC. Previously, SR had asked Veterans

UK's Deputy Head, Rob Rountree, to speak about the work of Veterans UK – but at the last minute, he had been unable to make it; SR covered the Veterans UK area in his place. The number of MPs attending was not great as there was an unexpected amount of party business in the House that day, which had accounted for several absentees – but importantly the SW VAPC message would be passed across to missing MPs by way of Minutes (for which, the Chairman had given the Secretary a shortened version of his script). All in all, SR said it had been a successful exercise in bringing the work of SW VAPC to the attention of our local MPs.

3. **Minutes of the Last Meeting.** Confirming that all had seen the previous meeting's Minutes issued earlier, the Chairman said it was his intention to forward them to Veterans UK for publication. The Committee were content the Minutes represented an accurate record of the last meeting and agreed SR should place them on the VAPC website. SR said that the only item outstanding from the preceding Minutes concerned the October date for VAPC members' training, but regretted that no date had yet been forthcoming. No other points that were not being covered on the present meeting's Agenda were raised.

4. **Addressing Legacy of NI's Past – Government Consultation.** The Chairman said that the Government were carrying out a consultation addressing the legacy of the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland (1968–2008). Members of the Armed Forces who'd served on Operation BANNER, veterans, and indeed all who had an interest in the future of NI were encouraged to participate. SR had published the background to this initiative earlier and said that full details could be found at: [www.gov.uk/nio](http://www.gov.uk/nio). More than 3,500 people had been killed as a result of the Troubles – and hurt and suffering caused was still being felt by people across NI and beyond. The Troubles had affected lots of people – victims and survivors – in many ways. Government was trying to find the best way to meet their needs and to help people address impact of the Troubles in terms of information, justice and recognition; and to assist with the transition to long term-term peace and stability in support of reconciliation and healing for society. The Consultation was to remain open for a further week until 10 Sep 18; it could be completed online or in writing. It was not SR's intention to produce a SW VAPC response – but he wanted to hear the Committee's reaction to the Consultation. Members' response was that they were dissatisfied with the nature of the Consultation. It was long-winded, over contextualised and took forever before participants could get to make meaningful comment. Members who had had a keen interest in its outcome had felt completely defeated by the demands of this Governmental sounding. Clearly, not aimed at ordinary people it would inevitably be ignored by the vast

majority of Service personnel and veterans alike. It was felt that SW VAPC's disquiet at the nature and lack of impact of the Consultation at ground level should be made clear – at least to the MOD. Although the Consultation would have been completed, Steve Turnbull (ST) was nevertheless asked to draft a letter to go from the Chairman of SW VAPC to the Chief of Defence People, Lieutenant General Richard Nugee CVO CBE outlining the Committee's reservations.

5. **SW VAPC Flyer.** The Chairman introduced a Veterans UK initiative – a regional advert for the work and role of VAPC. The Committee's view was that the flyer was essentially a website download that needed to be personalised and couched in more simple everyday language – along the lines of *How does this leaflet benefit, support or inform me?* The flyer needed a contact email address or Veterans telephone number; the name of the Chairman SW VAPC would have to be inserted in due course. A link to the Veterans' Gateway was thought helpful. It was the view that independent SW VAPC contact was preferable. Ben Bennington (BB), assisted by JS, was asked to lead on preparing a simpler, more down-to-earth document. Scott Porter (SP) was asked to investigate a SW VAPC email account, and SP also offered to let his designer work on the leaflet. If funding was required it was considered that an approach could be made to Veterans UK, local Armed Forces Covenant signatories, or County Councils – in a bid for cash from AFC funds.

6. **Veteran Friendly Accredited GPs Practices.** The Committee discussed an initiative endorsed by the Royal College of General Practitioners that SR had earlier circulated. The aim was to publicise 'Veteran Friendly' surgeries by accrediting GP practices. Practice Managers or GPs could access on-line courses to provide background awareness of veterans and how they might be assisted. The Chairman encouraged Members to approach their local surgeries with the PR material already issued. JS suggested including this as an item at County Council Covenant meetings; he would send AFC talk 'links' to Members referencing the radio talks that he had recently broadcast in Cornwall.

7. **Any Other Business:**

a. ST raised the understanding of AFC aims, which were often misunderstood by veterans and serving personnel alike. The Chairman stated that it was everyone's role to adjust expectations and to provide greater accuracy whenever necessary. The AFC team in the MOD, the chain of command and Veterans UK all needed to educate people's anticipations appropriately.

b. JY raised the issue of MOD 90 and MOD 91 and asked for information on progress. BB said that headway was actively being pursued within the MOD. The Committee felt that Resettlement information would need to be updated.

c. JS said that he would circulate a series of presentation notes across the board covering AFC, VAPC, and Veterans Gateway information.

8. **Next Meeting:**

a. Given the imminent announcement of a new chairman for SW VAPC, SR declined to set a date for the next meeting.

b. SR went on to explain that, notwithstanding his disappointment and a certain demotivation he presently felt at not being selected, he would in any case feel awkward working for another chairman's agenda – just as much as the next chair was likely to be uncomfortable operating with his predecessor present. After 5 years as a Member with (and latterly Chairman of) SW VAPC, SR would tender his resignation with immediate effect.

c. BB proposed a formal vote of thanks to the Chairman but at the same time urged SR to rethink his resolve to resign; the Committee endorsed BB's remarks wholeheartedly. SR agreed to reflect further over the next few days; he would clarify his decision shortly.

***Afternote.*** *Simon Reed decided to stick with his decision to resign from the SW VAPC.*