

# Northern Ireland Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committee

## GOVERNANCE

The Northern Ireland Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committee (VAPC) is established under Section 25 of the Social Security Act 1989 as amended by The Armed Forces Bill 2015, supported by Statutory Instrument 2017 No 1131 (C105) Defence.

The Northern Ireland VAPC replaced the Northern Ireland War Pensions Committee with effect from 1 April 2010.

### Purpose and Objectives

The functions of the committees are set out in Section 25 of the Social Security Act 1989 and subsequent amendments, the most recent being The Veterans Advisory & Pensions Committees Regulations 2016. Broadly, the statutory purpose of the VAPC is to:

- Provide assistance to individuals.
- Create awareness of veterans' needs.
- Review government initiatives regarding the veteran's community and provide informed, factual advice for Minister Defence People and Veterans (Min DPV).
- Be well informed on and respond to Veterans' needs and issues within their particular region whilst at all times retaining their Independence and Integrity.

### Status

The Northern Ireland VAPC is an Advisory Non-Departmental Public Body which regulates its own business independent of the Ministry of Defence, to acknowledge regional differences particularly in the devolved administrations. Chairmen and Members are appointed on a 3-year term by Minister Defence People and Veterans. The VAPC has no formal relationship with the devolved Ministries in Northern Ireland.

### Activities

As part of The Veterans Transition Review undertaken by Lord Ashcroft in 2014, 'The Armed Forces Covenant & Veterans' Advocacy', one of the (accepted) recommendations was to 'mobilise the VAPCs to help local authorities and practitioners pursue best practice and ensure more consistent performance in delivering the Community Covenant.'

Each Committee may form sub-committees, to assist with its business. VAPC and their sub-committees meet at varying intervals but with each main Committee meeting at least twice a year depending on the volume of business to be transacted. Committees may also choose to meet with Committees from other Regions where this is necessary to conduct useful Committee business.

The principal activities of the Northern Ireland Committee can be summarised as follows:

- To act as advocates for Veterans in support of the Armed Forces Covenant. Improve and monitor cross Government support, including local support services building upon those outlined in the Armed Forces Community Covenant and the Armed Forces Corporate Covenant.

- To raise awareness within Northern Ireland and provide assistance and guidance to individuals in accessing the War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Schemes and to provide an independent element to the Veterans UK formal complaints process relating to these schemes by convening an Independent Complaints Panel as and when required.
- Engage and develop relationships with regional partners e.g. (but not limited to) devolved government departments, the 11 local councils, regional health authorities and trusts, ex-service organisations and industry to promote and enhance the services that they provide to veterans. Strengthening and improving regional work in areas such as veterans' health, housing, employment between the public and voluntary sector by, for example: continuing engagement with Council Covenant Boards and Armed Forces Forums, where such, or other like groups, exist. Thereby ensuring prompt support without bureaucracy to those most in need and playing a central role in promoting the interests and welfare of veterans and their families.
- Acting as bodies to enable and foster consultation by the Secretary of State, the MOD, Veterans UK and the Armed Forces Covenant Team on issues affecting those entitled to payments under the War Pension/Armed Forces Compensation Schemes.
- The Northern Ireland VAPC is committed to continue to work closely with the SPVA Veterans Welfare Service, No 5 Regional Welfare Centre Glasgow and the VWS Belfast Office to ensure that the welfare needs of veterans and dependants are met.
- Undertake case-work where appropriate and, where required accompany Veterans UK staff on visits to Veterans in need and/or assist in directing them to the appropriate organisation.
- **Veterans Welfare Service.**

These Terms of Reference are not intended to be so prescriptive as to make it prohibitive for Committees to carry out other activities within their region that would be of benefit to the ex-service community and their families.

## **Members and Chairman**

The committee members, including the position of chairman, are appointed by the Secretary of State.

Each appointment is for a 3 year period. A Member may be put forward for re-appointment by Minister should the Member and Chairman agree that this is in the committee's best interest. The maximum period in office must not exceed 10 years on the same committee.

If a member wishes to move to another committee then they must go through an open recruitment exercise and their period in post starts again.

A committee may, from among its members, appoint a sub committee which shall consist of no fewer than 3 members or no more than four fifths of the total number of members.

MOD as sponsor department provides a team to give appropriate oversight scrutiny of, and support and assistance to the VAPC, in accordance with the Cabinet Office standards on Corporate Governance.

## **Secretariat**

Chairmen are responsible for appointing one of their Members to the position of Committee Secretary to record minutes of regional committee meetings and to perform appropriate Secretariat duties.

## **Requirements**

- Minutes of each meeting must be recorded, agreed, published on the VAPC web pages and open to inspection by the Secretary of State in accordance with the Cabinet Office transparency agenda.
- The Committee has the flexibility to receive and disburse funds as outlined in the SI. This must be done in conjunction with a robust accounting system via a separate bank account for each region. The setting up of a Committee bank account must be recorded with the Veterans UK Sponsor Team.
- There is a requirement under The War Pensions Committees (Amendment) Regulations 2017 to report on the activities of the VAPC. This is done via annual reporting to the sponsor team lead and fed up to Min DPV. Updates are also given at the VAPC Chairmen's biannual conference which Min DPV is invited to attend.
- A sub committee which considers a complaint, made by a person receiving or claiming under WPS/AFCS, must submit a report of the hearing to the committee as soon as is reasonably practicable together with a copy of any representations it has made to Secretary of State.

## **Observers**

A regional Committee may, on occasions, open its meeting up to invited observers as agreed by the Chairman. Amongst other things this may be for the purpose of furthering a networking opportunity, fostering relationships within the community or to give prospective new members an opportunity to see how a Committee operates.

## **Public Service Values**

Committee members are expected to:

- observe the highest standards of impartiality, integrity, and objectivity in relation to the advice they provide
- be accountable to the Secretary of State for the Committee's activities and for the standard of advice they provide
- follow the seven principles of public life set out by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (Annex A) in accordance with Government policy on openness; comply fully with the Code of Practice on Access to Government information.

## **Declaration of Interests**

All committee members should declare any personal or business interest which may, or may be perceived (by a reasonable member of public) to influence their judgment. This should include, as a minimum, personal direct and indirect pecuniary interests and should normally also include such interests of close family members and of people living in the same household. The register of interests should be kept and up to date and be open to the public via their gov.uk website.

## **Data Protection**

Committees must bear in mind the requirements of the **General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA18)** and at all times handle any personal information gathered as a result of Committee business securely and sensitively. The GDPR applies to 'personal data' meaning, any information relating to any person who can be directly or indirectly identified by reference to an identifier, including name, identification number, location data or online identifier. For further information please refer to the Handbook.

## **Diversity**

The Centre for Public Appointments (CPA) in the Cabinet Office works with the Commissioner for Public Appointments to oversee the diversity of appointments to Public Boards. However, all VAPC Chairs and Members should play their part in recognising that diversity is about more than gender or race it is about the promotion of vacancies on the VAPC to a wide range of candidates from diverse backgrounds and with diverse skillsets.

All VAPC Chairs and Members are encouraged to play their part in promoting diversity across the regions by encouraging applications for the annual recruitment exercise from candidates with the widest range of backgrounds.

## **Term of This Document**

This Terms of Reference is effective from 24 July 2018 and will be reviewed after each tailored review.

## **The Seven Principles of Public Life**

The seven principles of public life are the principles that underpin the Code of Practice. They come directly from recommendations by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (Nolan: First Report, May 1995 [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/336919/1stInquiryReport.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/336919/1stInquiryReport.pdf)). They are the foundations of the public appointments process and are designed to ensure appointment on merit and a quality outcome

### **Selflessness**

Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

### **Integrity**

Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisation that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

### **Objectivity**

In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

### **Accountability**

Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

### **Openness**

Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

### **Honesty**

Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interests.

### **Leadership**

Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.