

Veterans Advisory Board: Minutes

Meeting: 22 June 2021, 10:00-12:00

INTRODUCTION

Welcoming recently appointed Minister for Defence People and Veterans Leo Docherty MP (MinDPV), and Independent Veterans Advisor David Richmond, to the third meeting of the Veterans Advisory Board, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office Rt Hon Michael Gove MP (CDL) reflected that the meeting was occurring during Armed Forces Week, an important time to honour both those currently serving and our veterans.

HMG UPDATE

Office for Veterans’ Affairs (OVA) Director, Jessie Owen, outlined developments since the Veterans Advisory Board last met in February including:

1. The Armed Forces Bill which has continued to work its way through Parliament, this includes measures to further strengthen the Armed Forces Covenant in law, placing a duty of due regard on local public service providers who have responsibility for the key policy areas of housing, health and education.
2. In March Government launched Op Courage which simplifies access to the NHS England veterans’ mental health services, bringing three existing bespoke services for veterans together with a single point of access. This Government is committed to enhancing health and wellbeing for veterans.
3. In April, Government introduced a National Insurance contributions holiday rewarding employers for backing our veterans, while also extending employment opportunities for many talented veterans in this country.
4. In March, for the first time, the Census asked people in England and Wales whether they are a veteran, allowing us to shape care for veterans and their local communities for years to come.

MinDPV outlined the key role of the Office for Veterans’ Affairs (OVA) in driving forward the next iteration of the Strategy Action Plan. To develop this the OVA and MinDPV are seeking collaboration across government, to drive tangible outcomes and deliverables in its commitments.

MinDPV outlined that his priorities are:

1. Addressing historic hurt amongst some veteran groups
2. Delivering gold-standard services, especially in health and wellbeing
3. Maximising veteran employability
4. Celebrating Veterans’ contribution to society throughout the Union
5. Address the legacy issues relating to Northern Ireland

DISCUSSION

Veterans Advisory Board Members were in agreement of these priorities, and raised that when looking at employability, digital skills need to be considered. There was discussion around improving the understanding of veterans needs through data sets, and ensuring that there is UK-wide consistency in understanding. The Board also recommended that while working toward leveraging digital capabilities both within Government Services and digital transformation within the charity sector we need to consider those without capability or access to digital services.

LEGACY ISSUES

There was discussion recognising the ongoing work to resolve the complex legacy issues in Northern Ireland. The Board particularly outlined that any form of resolution needs to be focused around helping people move on. Any work done in this space goes beyond veterans and is also vital for their families.

MinDPV also thanked the Northern Irish Veterans Commissioner, Danny Kinahan, for his work and communication with those in Northern Ireland still dealing with legacy issues.

The Board will reconvene in October.