**VETERANS ADVISORY BOARD**

22 February 2022

ATTENDEES

Leo Docherty MP Minister for Defence People and Veterans

David Richmond CBE Independent Veterans Advisor

Andrew Anderson VAB member

David Murray CVO OBE DL VAB member

Peter Mountford VAB member

Nicky Murdoch MBE VAB member

Sir Simon Wessely Kt VAB member

Leon Lloyd VAB member

Sir Nicholas Pope KCB CBE VAB member

Danny Kinahan NI Veterans Commissioner

Jessie Owen Director, Office for Veterans’ Affairs

DISCUSSION

Jessie Owen outlined the renewed Ministerial governance for veterans issues following the recent reshuffle. She noted that while the Chancellor for Duchy of Lancaster (CDL) would retain overall responsibility as the Cabinet Minister responsible for veterans, due to his extended Ministerial responsibilities CDL had decided to delegate day to day duties to the Minister for the Cabinet Office, Michael Ellis MP.

VAB members were reminded of Government security protocols for board meetings. An amended security policy was outlined, reflecting the transition back to physical meetings after the temporary virtual arrangements implemented in response to the pandemic. It was highlighted that this policy is not intended to discourage appropriate discourse with members of the veteran community following board meetings, which is encouraged.

Members were made aware of progress in the development of a policy regarding waiving settlement fees for Non-UK service personnel and veterans. This was an issue on which the VAB had engaged readily, advising Ministers of the impact that this issue was having on veterans and their families and encouraging a generous policy response. Challenges that had delayed development were noted, but officials reassured members that the policy was developing positively and nearing a resolution. VAB members affirmed their view of the need for this to be addressed, and looked forward to the upcoming announcement.

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans initiated a conversation around the contributions the VAB had made so far and the best way for it to continue to do so. As well as the board's work advising on Non-UK settlement issues, the influence of the board was noted in relation to work to improve the Veterans’ Gateway, to deliver the independent LGBT review in a sensitive and pragmatic way, and to address the impact of the legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict on veterans.

Members were asked for reactions on the recently published Veterans’ Strategy Action Plan. The board praised the range of tangible deliverables contained in the plan, but noted the importance of a clear plan to measure and deliver upon them. The board noted the need for a clearer narrative and definition of what it means to be the best place to be a veteran, and the desirability of catching the imagination and telling a strong story about support for veterans. Officials outlined work underway to ensure this, including engagement with officials and Ministers in other Government departments, and work being undertaken to define success criteria and enable the development of performance metrics.