**VETERANS ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES**

24 October 2022, 14.00-15.00

**ATTENDEES**

1. The Rt Hon James Heappey MP, Minister for Armed Forces and Veterans
2. Jessie Owen, Director, Office for Veterans’ Affairs
3. VAB Members: David Richmond CBE, Susanna Hamilton, James Phillips, Danny Kinahan, Sir Nick Pope KCB CBE, Prof Beverly Bergman OBE, Nicky Murdoch MBE, Louisa Clarke, Lee Buss-Blair, Leon Lloyd, Paul Findlay

| **ITEM** | **MINUTES** |
| --- | --- |
| **1** | **Welcome from Minister for Armed Forces and Veterans** * The Minister for Armed Forces and Veterans opened the meeting and thanked the group for their ongoing work to support veterans.
* The Minister set out his hopes for ensuring a positive narrative on veterans and working across Government in order to drive improvements.
 |
| **2** | **Welcome from Jessie Owen, Director of the Office for Veterans’ Affairs** Jessie Owen set out the priorities for the Government and aims of the Office for Veterans’ Affairs. Jessie also provided an update on the commitments in the Strategy Action Plan and key areas of success; and developments on the Northern Ireland Legacy Bill, public perceptions of veterans and the LGBT veterans review.  |
| **3** | **Forward Look**Jessie Owen explained how future meetings would be run and planned. * Jessie Owen indicated that the OVA Data and Research Framework would soon be published.
* The Minister noted that Northern Ireland legacy legislation will be a focus over the next few months whilst it is before Parliament, and asked the Veterans Commissioner for Northern Ireland to update at the next meeting.
* The group agreed that early sight of planned topics for discussion would be desirable in order to allow for sufficient preparation. The group suggested inviting relevant senior officials for thematic meetings.
* The group also discussed the need for strong relationships with the academic community to identify important areas of need, and expressed interest in the forthcoming Data and Research Framework.
* Methods for identifying veterans were raised as an ongoing issue. Members of the board agreed and noted that veterans engaged with the charity sector form only a minority of the veteran community. The Minister proposed a future discussion on exploring how best to communicate with the veteran community.
* The group discussed the delivery of the Strategy Action Plan and linkages with work in NI, Scotland and Wales.
 |
| **4** | **Cost of Living**The Minister for Armed Forces and Veterans asked the group to share their insights into how cost of living issues may affect veterans. * It was widely agreed by the panel that any challenges faced by veterans will be similar to those faced by the general population, noting that the situation may develop and change as time progresses. There was a view that more data may be forthcoming which might inform future action by service charities and others.
* The Minister asked the group if they felt that veterans are more or less likely to come forward for support. The board reflected that while there may be barriers to access, there could be further work to communicate to the cohort about the support that they are eligible to receive.
* The group noted that any support offered to veterans should be prioritised for the most vulnerable.
* It was noted that charities might see a shortfall in donations and fundraising, but evidence on this is not yet clear. Members also raised the issue of accessibility to existing support packages.
 |
| **5** | **AOB**Members asked about the relationship between the VAB and the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust. Jessie Owen suggested it may be valuable to have a representative of the AFCFT come and talk to the board about their work at a future meeting. |