

Scotland Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committee (VAPC) Meeting Minutes
Thursday the 26th of January 2023 (17:00-19:00), Held at Kentigern House, 65 Brown Street,
Glasgow, G2 8EX.

Present: Alan Hamilton, Chair (AH); Huw Sherrard, Secretary (HS); Audrey Cuthbertson (AC); Kate Thomas (KT); Alistair Gemmell (AG).

Present (Virtually): Mike McCourt (MMcC); Sue Raw (SRa); Sandy Reid (SRe); Don Young (DY); Stuart Roberts (SRo); Andrew Ward (AW); Iain Findlay (IF).

Attending: Susanna Hamilton, Scottish Veterans Commissioner (SH).

Apologies: Andrew Ward, Vice Chair (AW); William Lindsay (WL); Jim Wilson (JW); Laura Cox (LC); Don Young (DY); Megan Poundall (MP).

1. Welcome and Apologies

AH welcomed the Members of the Committee present and acknowledged apologies. AH welcomed SH, the Scottish Veterans Commissioner, and noted that the minutes of the previous meeting and relevant matters arising would be approved following her presentation due to time constraints.

2. Presentation from Susanna Hamilton, Scottish Veterans Commissioner

SH introduced herself and their role, as well as their priorities and focuses for their term - as well as expressing a desire to develop a working relationship with the Scotland VAPC. SRe asked how the Commissioner's priorities aligned and related to the UK Government's priorities: SH answered how each in turn fit within current Scottish Government activity and priorities, as well as her own purview. SH described an ongoing focus on engaging with Veterans and the Armed Forces community - including with young people involved with Forces Children Scotland, and BLESMA.

AC asked about the Commissioner's work in relation to mental health and wellbeing, particularly in relation to the varying quality and availability across Scotland - a 'postcode lottery'. SH agreed, and that addressing this postcode lottery is an issue that should be addressed imminently. AH described issues relating to veteran prisoners, SH outlined how that fell within the focus on Veterans and the Law and what work was ongoing in those areas. SRo asked the Commissioner's view on the quantity of organisations seeking to support Veterans and the Armed Forces community, and the risk of competition exceeding co-operation between them. SH described the co-ordinating role of the Scottish Government and Veterans Scotland in organising the third sector, as well as ongoing work to coordinate local authorities, and provision between local authorities.

KT asked how the VAPC could support the Commissioner in her work. SH outlined how ongoing change to the VAPCs meant that there was a large degree of potential co-operation depending on how context changes - however, formalising communication between the Committee and the Commissioner would be a good first step. AH described his work as the Committee's Chair in relation to statutory and governance changes to VAPCs nationally, particularly in relation to devolved contexts that VAPCs operated in outwith England. AH thanked SH for her time and for her attendance at the Committee's meeting.

3. Previous Minutes and Matters Arising

The Committee approved the previous minutes, with the correction of those present to include MMcC.

AH outlined the matters arising from the previous meeting, including an update on the ongoing independent review of VAPCs by a civil servant from DEFRA. HS asked whether the review might be moving towards a recommendation to abolish the VAPCs as public bodies. AH stated that that was a possibility, but in his view not the most likely result of the process. AG asked how initiated the review. AH stated that it was a routine process for Advisory Non-Departmental Public Bodies. The Committee agreed that there was an urgent need for change to VAPCs, and its hope that the review might result or support achieving this.

4. Strategy Development

AH noted AW's apologies for the meeting, and therefore suggested that this item be included in a future meeting.

5. Recruitment of VAPC Members

AH informed the Committee that the adverts for vacancies within VAPCs were in the process of being approved, and that there were now two applications for the vacancy of Chair. AC asked how Members could find the listing, and AH asked HS to circulate when they were released.

6. Future Focus

AH noted that a number of topics under this item had been discussed elsewhere, and the Committee agreed that any discussion was reliant on knowing more about how future changes to VAPCs - a developing situation. The Committee agreed that discussions of its future focus should be a regular item on agendas for the foreseeable future.

7. AOCB

AH noted that the next meeting was scheduled for 16/03/23, and that details of the meeting would be confirmed at a later date.

Signed as true on 16/03/23 by Alan Hamilton, Chair:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Alan Hamilton', written over a horizontal line.