

**PUBLIC BODIES REVIEW
PROGRAMME: VETERANS
ADVISORY AND PENSIONS
COMMITTEES**

Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committees Independent Review 2023

27 March 2023

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Executive Summary

I have conducted a review of the Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committees (VAPCs) under the Cabinet Office Public Bodies Framework between December 2022 and March 2023. I have interviewed all VAPC regional Chairs and a range of government and external stakeholders.

My overall view is that the VAPCs do not have a clear purpose. This means they do not have a clear impact and they are not set up to succeed. This is in large part not the fault of the VAPCs. The context and ecosystem within which they operate has changed significantly since they were created a century ago. Their remit has expanded well beyond what was originally envisaged, so much so that they spend only a fraction of their time on pensions¹ matters at all. They, and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) as sponsor body, have not kept up with these changes. The MOD has not provided the necessary challenge and support to get the most out of the VAPCs.

Instead, the VAPCs have focused their efforts on networking and engaging locally to advocate for the Armed Forces Covenant and support individual veterans. This is valuable work and I have heard examples of real impact at a local level. Indeed, the VAPC chairs and members that I spoke to are highly motivated and committed to the betterment of veterans and their families. Multiplied across the 12 committees this amounts to over 200 people volunteering in their community. However, many people I interviewed felt that other bodies could fulfil at least some of these roles.

The VAPCs have struggled to deliver the impact on national policy making that is a core part of their current Terms of Reference. This was the view of many VAPC Chairs and members I spoke to, but by no means all. “Most people who retire from the VAPCs say they haven't achieved anything”, was not an uncommon sentiment, with many people stating that the government was missing the “opportunity” the VAPCs present.

Most of the people I spoke to did feel there was a need for a group to provide a regional perspective and one that was independent and able to give unvarnished views. The VAPCs could deliver this function, but to do so impactfully will require significant changes to their direction, governance, sponsorship, and accountability as I set out in my report.

It is therefore vital that government decides what purpose they want the VAPCs to fulfil, and whether the significant effort required to get there is worth it. If there is no appetite for

¹ Although the term ‘pensions’ is used the schemes related to the VAPCs are actually compensation schemes. This confusing name is something I return to later in my report

such change then the VAPCs should be wound down, and the honourable service of their members recognised.

Mark Thompson

Director EU and International Trade

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

List of outcomes and relevant recommendations

Outcome A – provide a clear purpose for the VAPCs within the veterans' eco- system

- **Recommendation 1** – the government should clearly define the purpose of the VAPCs, ideally in statute, and commit to their reform. Otherwise, wind down the VAPCs
- **Recommendation 2** – subject to the wider reforms of this review, the government should endorse the recommendations of the AFCS Quinquennial review on a more formalised role for the VAPCs in assisting veterans with AFCS claims
- **Recommendation 3** – the government should change the name of the VAPCs to something that better represents their purpose and improve awareness of the VAPCs through veterans' communications

If the VAPCs are retain and reformed, then they should be part of the aim of making the UK the best place in the world to be a veteran. The outcomes below are one way the VAPCs could contribute to this. Against each outcome are the relevant recommendations that would help deliver them.

Outcome B – delivering bottom-up, nation-wide, evidence-based recommendations

- **Recommendation 4** – the sponsor body should write to the VAPC Chair of Chairs annually setting out the priority areas for them to focus on for the coming year
- **Recommendation 5** – the sponsor body should provide detailed feedback on VAPC annual reports, with particular reference to how well they have delivered against the priority areas in the Chair’s letter
- **Recommendation 14** – the sponsor body should work with a dedicated group of VAPC members to define what appropriate evidence (and data collection) is needed to support their work and deliver impactful annual reports
- **Recommendation 15** – the VAPCs should ensure greater information sharing and comparing across regions to aggregate into an informative national picture

Outcome C – committees that better reflect the diverse range of veterans

- **Recommendation 12** – the sponsor body and VAPCs should target recruitment for Committee members at groups who are under-represented on Committees
- **Recommendation 17** – VAPC Chairs should provide the sponsor body recruitment team with clear skills and diversity needs to include in recruitment materials

Outcome D – ‘professionalising’ a volunteer army

- **Recommendation 9** – the government and VAPCs should implement the changes to the Chair of Chairs construct as set out in paragraphs 67-71
- **Recommendation 10** – the government should reduce the minimum size of the Committees to eight members. This should be done over time rather than immediately and subject to a more targeted remit for the VAPCs

- **Recommendation 11** – the government should increase the term of new members to four years, with the option to reappoint for a further four years subject to satisfactory appraisal
- **Recommendation 16** – I ask the VAPCs to seriously consider using the system the MOD have offered, accepting the limitations, and ask the MoD to move quickly to implement it once it is accepted. This may need to be reviewed if my recommendation to move sponsorship to the OVA is accepted

Outcome E – giving the VAPCs the support they need to succeed, and a home where they can influence the full range of veteran's issues

- **Recommendation 6** – the sponsor body should provide more focused and active sponsorship of the VAPCs, challenging, supporting, and holding them to account for delivering against their TORs and the recommended Chair's letter
- **Recommendation 7** – the sponsor body should improve information flows to the VAPCs, taking account of security restrictions. This should include, but not be limited to, protocols for sharing policy announcements and information in good time for the VAPCs to perform their advocacy role effectively
- **Recommendation 8** – the government should move the sponsorship role for the VAPCs to the OVA, and this must include sufficient Civil Service resource to deliver on the other recommendations in this report
- **Recommendation 13** – the sponsor body to provide Civil Service secretariat support for the Chair of Chairs
- **Recommendation 18** – the sponsorship team should hold Chairs to account for appraising their members in-line with the Handbook guidance. And a sufficiently senior MOD person, with knowledge of the performance of the committee Chairs should review the self-assessment forms before reappointment is agreed
- **Recommendation 19** – the sponsor body should consider whether the VAPCs TORs could support greater clarity for the Committees operating in the devolved nations.

The Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committees – Background and Context

1. The Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committees (VAPCs) were formerly known as War Pensions Committees and date back to 1921, when members adjudicated and administered grants to disabled ex-servicemen, cared for their families and monitored the Ministry of Pensions War Disablement Pensions Scheme.
2. The committees have evolved during that time and there are now 12 VAPCs that provide regional support across the UK (nine in England, and one each in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland).
3. The VAPCs are an independent advisory non-departmental public body. They are sponsored by the Armed Forces and Veterans Services (AF&V) team in Defence Business Services (DBS), which is part of the Ministry of Defence (MOD). Committee members are unpaid volunteers appointed by the Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families (Min DPVSF) following open and fair competition using the process set out in the Cabinet Office's Governance Code on Public Appointments. This is overseen by the independent Commissioner for Public Appointments.
4. The current statutory function of the VAPCs is to engage at a local level with War Pensioners / Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS) recipients, in particular by raising awareness of the War Pensions and AFCSs – as well as wider DBS AF&V welfare services, so far as they relate to War Pensions / AFCS recipients – and making representations and recommendations to Government regarding any issues experienced with those services locally. The War Pension Scheme and the AFCS are MOD schemes which pay compensation to Service personnel who are injured, where that injury caused or made worse by Service.
5. The statutory basis for the VAPCs' functions are set out in the War Pensions Committees Regulations 2000 and are made under sections 25 and 29 of the Social Security Act 1989 and section 175(2) to (5) of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992.
6. The VAPCs predate the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) and the landscape in which they operate has changed since the AFC was introduced. In recent years, they have also taken on a broader range of (non-statutory) activities, such as raising awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant. As such, the MOD, in parallel to this Review, is delivering a Private Member's Bill (PMB) to widen the statutory scope of the VAPCs to ensure it puts their non-statutory role into statute. Review recommendations that

may be accepted by Ministers from my Review are likely to help inform secondary legislation.

7. In November 2021, MOD, working closely with the Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA) in the Cabinet Office, provided the VAPCs with new non-statutory supplementary Terms of Reference² (TORs) for a period of twelve months. These TORs were intended to set the VAPCs a clearer and more wide-ranging role and to ask them to complete certain local-engagement activities on which they are to report back to Min DPVSF at the end of the twelve-month period, to help inform Minister's determination on next steps following the initial 12-month period.
8. The last review³ of the VAPCs was conducted in 2016 under the Triennial Review Programme. That review made 12 recommendations of which most have been implemented. The full list can be found at Annex B.
9. My review is running in parallel with a government-supported Private Members' Bill (PMB) brought by Robin Millar MP that seeks to reform the statutory basis of the VAPCs⁴. As well as a Quinquennial Review of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme⁵.
10. On 2 March 2023⁴⁵⁶⁷, during my review, the Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families announced a review⁸ of the role and scope of welfare provision for veterans, including by the Ministry of Defence under the Veterans UK banner. The Minister explained that the review will align with conclusions of the review of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme and of my own review. I consider this important given the complex nature of the veterans' space.

² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/104447

³ [/VAPC Supplementary Terms of Reference adopted 15 November 2021.pdf](#)

⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/572848/

⁵ [-VAPC TR Report FINAL-OS.pdf](#)

⁶ <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3214>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/quinquennial-review-of-the-armed-forces-compensation-scheme-2023-headline-findings-and-progress-report/armed-forces-compensation-scheme-quinquennial-review-2023-headline-findings>

⁸ [Written statements - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#)

The Review

11. I have conducted my review under the Cabinet Office Public Bodies Review Programme⁹, the aim of which is to ensure that public bodies deliver brilliant public services by ensuring they are accountable, efficient, and effective, and aligned to the Government's priorities.
12. The range of questions and areas of focus set out in the review guidance is significant, and deliberately so as it needs to cover arm's length bodies (ALBs) ranging from small, expert committees through to ten-thousand strong front-line delivery bodies and regulators.
13. The VAPCs are at the lower end of this spectrum in terms of scale and complexity and as a result, I have judged that parts of the guidance are not relevant. The self-assessment conducted prior to my review by the MOD sponsor made a similar judgement. I have therefore focused on the areas that are most important for this type of advisory ALB, and that I believe will make the greatest difference where changes are needed. Where I have not commented on a particular area, this is because it is not relevant, or it is working well.
14. The Review's TORs, set by Min DPVSF, states that my review should assess the governance, efficacy, and accountability of the VAPCs. This will include an evaluation of VAPC performance and effectiveness, as well as the efficiency and effectiveness of the MOD in its sponsorship role.
15. To do this, I have considered the work of the VAPCs based on their role in statute, and under the supplementary TORs given to them in November 2021
16. Whilst I have not considered questions of policy, as these are for relevant officials and Ministers, I have passed comment where I consider the form, function, governance, and accountability of the VAPCs and their sponsor body is impacting on delivery of the policy intention, as set out in current statute and the 2021 supplementary TORs.

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-bodies-review-programme>

17. My review was conducted between December 2022 and March 2023. I have interviewed a wide range of stakeholders including the VAPC Chair of Chairs; 12 VAPC regional chairs and some committee members; Min DPVSF and Minister for Veterans' Affairs; the Veterans Commissioners for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; the Government's Independent Veterans Advisor; Government officials from the Devolved Administrations; a range of MOD officials; and the Chair of the Confederation of Service Charities (COBSEO). I have conducted more than 30 interviews.
18. I have also relied on other evidence such as the VAPC Annual Reports; Chair and committee member recruitment materials; the VAPC Handbook for Chairs and Members; the self-assessment of the VAPCs as completed by the MOD sponsor; and, the previous Triennial Review from 2016. I was also very kindly invited to attend a meeting of the South-West VAPC to see how a Committee works in practice.
19. One group I was not able to engage with directly is of course veterans and their families themselves. It would have been difficult to draw robust conclusions from such a heterogeneous group by speaking to the small number of veterans I would have been able to interact with in the time available for the review. I have therefore had to imperfectly proxy for them based on other stakeholder interviews. But I recognise that all stakeholders come with their own interests and so treat all inputs accordingly.

Future of the VAPCs

Changed context and unclear purpose

20. I have seen and heard throughout my review that the VAPCs are made up of Chairs and committee members who are hugely committed to improving the lot of veterans and their families. This means over 200 volunteers around the country who are working hard, often beyond the expected hours of their appointments, to deliver on the Government's aim of making the UK the best place in the world to be a veteran.
21. The VAPCs do this in a congested space alongside many other professional organisations such as central and local government, the charity sector, and other independent appointees like the Veterans' Commissioners and Veterans' Advisor.
22. Added to this is the expanded remit for the VAPCs as set out in the supplementary 2021 TORs. This has moved them even further away from their statutory role focusing on war pensions and the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme. They are now focusing much more on issues outside of the MOD's purview e.g. in the Veterans Strategy space. Many VAPC members I interviewed felt the TORs were a step forward and gave them the wider remit they wanted, especially around the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC).
23. The most fundamental issue for the VAPCs is that no-one I interviewed was clear on what they are there for. There were many different views on what they could, and should, do but most felt they were lacking a clear mission statement. In fact, "Where's the mission statement?" was a question I heard several times. One view I heard repeatedly was that the VAPCs are the "eyes and ears" of the Minister on the ground. However, this does not in itself provide any direction nor guarantee impact.
24. This lack of purpose undermines the VAPCs' impact, their ability to recruit and retain, their relationship with the veterans' community and other bodies in this space, how the department sponsors them, and their ability to influence change, amongst other things.

25. It is for ministers to define exactly what the role of the VAPCs should be, but in doing so it should be clear to all involved. Most of the VAPC Chairs I interviewed stated that this should be done in statute as soon as possible.
26. Most of the other issues I address in my report stem from this lack of a clear purpose. Without it the VAPCs will never deliver. But this will not be sufficient. Significant reform of the VAPC model - direction, governance, sponsorship, and accountability – is required to make the VAPCs impactful and make the most of the committed volunteers.

Recommendation 1 – the government should clearly define the purpose of the VAPCs, ideally in statute, and commit to their reform. Otherwise, wind down the VAPCs

27. If the decision is ultimately to wind down the VAPCs this should not be seen as a failure. Their members have served honourably for over a century and should be recognised as such. I hope that this can be suitably marked, and some consideration given to supporting members into applying for other public appointments and / or finding a place within the wider ecosystem so that their experience, skills, and enthusiasm can continue to support veterans.

Impact

28. The VAPCs have continued to try and have an impact both locally and at the national level. Based on my interviews they have been more successful with the former than the latter. Locally, within their regions, many interviewees explained that the VAPCs have developed impressive networks with charities, local authorities, NHS trusts, and many other stakeholders. This has allowed them to advocate and raise awareness of veterans' issues. In many cases Chairs reported successfully pressing key delivery agents to up their game and sign up to the AFC.
29. They have also supported individual veterans with their war pension claims, and through sign-posting to the wider support network. I return to the VAPCs role on war pensions more generally below.
30. Part of the challenge of my review has been determining whether this impact would have happened through another organisation in the veterans' space if the VAPCs were not there. Particularly since many interviewees highlighted that the VAPCs were not well known by veterans or other actors in the veterans' space. Some VAPC members did explain that their independence and willingness to help any veteran regardless of circumstances meant they were a last line of support where other bodies did not feel able to help. On the other hand, some people felt that if the VAPCs

did not exist, it would not impact on delivery for veterans; this included some VAPC members.

31. In terms of the VAPCs having an impact nationally, here I find very little. The annual reports that the VAPCs present to the Minister have not changed national policy and there is little follow-up from the MOD on the recommendations. The problem here is two-sided. Although some interviewees commend the recommendations and information in the reports and were disappointed that the MOD hadn't not taken account of them, many felt they are overly long, not well summarised, and do not explain the evidence upon which recommendations were made. In addition, many interviewees felt that there is insufficient summation of the regional portrait into a national picture. This makes it hard for MOD policy makers to rely upon. Many VAPC members explained the significant amount of effort that went into creating the reports – especially corralling twelve committees together – but also recognised the shortcomings of the reports. They noted that some evidence and important detail is lost in the aggregating process.
32. For their part, the MoD have failed to provide proper feedback on the reports to the VAPCs. There has been piecemeal correspondence on some parts of the report but this is insufficient. This lack of proper feedback makes it impossible for the VAPCs to learn and improve, to understand why they are not having the desired impact. It perpetuates a cycle of reports that are not what the MoD need and frustration at the lack of impact by the VAPCs. This is hard to sustain for a group of volunteers.
33. Based on the evidence I have gathered, the VAPCs are squeezed in a congested landscape, and are not having the impact that they or their sponsor body would wish. Despite this, they are making some difference locally, but it is not clear to me that only the VAPCs can deliver this. They, and their sponsor body, are not making enough of what many interviewees saw as their unique selling point, their regionality, to impact nationally, despite cited improvements over the last few years.

The VAPCs' Pensions role

34. Given the VAPC's title and formal role on supporting veterans with War Pension Scheme (WPS) and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS)¹⁰ claims this was an area which some VAPC members saw as core to their mission. And that the VAPCs' independence was an important factor for claimants who were going through the process. But many other interviewees (including some VAPC Chairs and members) felt it had been overtaken by wider changes. For example, the provision of information available on the internet, professional legal services, and the charity

¹⁰ The War Pension Scheme (WPS) compensates for any injury, illness or death which was caused by service before 6 April 2005. Whilst the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme provides compensation for any injury, illness or death which is caused by service on or after 6 April 2005.

sector. Many Chairs explained how they had seen very few cases brought to their committees over the years, such that this formal role was withering.

35. Several interviewees felt having a role on both schemes for untrained volunteers put them in a difficult position. With some also feeling uneasy that a government representative sits on both sides of the argument, both supporting a veteran and arguing against the claimant at a tribunal. Several interviewees thought the role should be best left to the Veterans Welfare Service and veteran charities who had more resources and expertise.
36. However, some interviewees highlighted that few law firms are helping veterans at tribunals, especially with complex cases, and that there is significantly reduced charity legal support. This meant that the VAPCs were often the last port of call. The MOD does not routinely direct veterans towards the VAPCs. This leaves a handful of committee members who are providing support and guidance to veterans based on their own knowledge and often by finding veterans through social media or local engagement.
37. My initial view was that it was the right time to end the VAPCs pension role given how limited it is, and the lack of sign-posting or training provided by the MOD. But having discussed further with the Lead Reviewer on Quinquennial review of the AFCS I am persuaded of the gap for vulnerable veterans that the VAPCs could be filling in a way that the MOD could not, and many law firms will not.
38. If the VAPCs are to play a stronger role here then the MOD needs to fundamentally alter its approach with the provision of adequate training for a suitable subset of VAPC members, engage the VAPCs in the right governance and in building relationships with caseworkers, and to systematically refer / sign- post veterans towards the VAPCs. The AFCS review will set this out in more detail and I endorse this approach.

Recommendation 2 – subject to the wider reforms of this review, the government should endorse the recommendations of the AFCS Quinquennial review on a more formalised role for the VAPCs in assisting veterans with AFCS claims

VAPC re-branding

39. Several interviewees explained that many people and groups did not know who the VAPCs were, including within the veterans' eco-system itself. Indeed, a recently commissioned survey by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Veterans showed that 70% of those surveyed (total 1040 veterans) were not familiar at all with the work of the VAPCs⁹.

40. As above, many also highlighted the limited role on pensions that the VAPCs actually play, even if it may expand in future as per recommendation 2. Noting that their remit had extended much further into the other services that veterans use and the Armed Forces Covenant space.

⁹ [4 in 5 Veterans Have Poor Experiences Claiming Compensation, New Survey Shows | James Sunderland MP | Member of Parliament for Bracknell](#) – whilst the survey has not formally been published, the review team has seen an advanced copy of the results

41. Many felt that the VAPC name meant veterans were not finding them, that others were not sign-posting towards the VAPCs, and it impacted recruitment and retention. I was also told by many interviewees that many veterans do not like the term ‘veteran’ or even consider themselves one despite having served. I therefore consider that the VAPC name is outdated and should be changed.

Recommendation 3 – the government should change the name of the VAPCs to something that better represents their purpose and improve awareness of the VAPCs through veterans’ communications

Improvements to the VAPC model

42. If government defines a clear purpose for the VAPCs and wants to make the model work then there needs to be significant change to how it operates. This section outlines my recommendations for these changes. I split these into primary and second order areas. As might be expected, the primary areas are the most important, but the second order areas will have an impact and were raised by several, and in some cases, many, interviewees. The primary areas are: Tasking; Sponsorship; Where the VAPCs should sit within government; Governance; and Diversity and the Composition of the Committees.
43. It is notable that the VAPCs have begun work on some of the areas I highlight below. For instance, revising their internal governance, and developing a strategy based on a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis. The government should lean into this work to ensure it is fit for purpose and in line with ALB guidance and my recommendations.

Tasking

44. Whilst defining the overall purpose of the VAPCs is clearly fundamental, so is their day-to-day tasking. The VAPCs' remit is broadly defined and was extended by the supplementary 2021 TORs. Interviewees explained that this has spread their limited resources thinly.
45. Most of the VAPC members I spoke to were also clear that they did not have their "marching orders" from the MOD so struggled to know where to focus. Often this meant trying to do everything, or being driven by the interests of individual committee members.
46. I highlighted above that VAPC Chairs set out a range of local and regional initiatives and engagement that members had driven and delivered, including their advocacy on the Armed Forces Covenant with local service providers. But both the Chairs and the MOD representatives felt the annual reports and influence on national policy had been very limited. No one could point to an instance where a recommendation from

the VAPCs had been taken forward into policy or implementation change at a national level. I believe one of the key reasons is lack of clear tasking.

47. It is usual practice for arm's length bodies to have an annual Chair's letter from the Minister responsible. This letter usually sets out what the Minister would like to see the ALB focus on over the coming year, within their statutory remit and level of independence. Given the problems around tasking, such a letter could ask the VAPCs to focus on two to three priority areas, for example veterans' health, housing, or transition. The VAPCs would then have a clear direction on which to focus their efforts and evidence gathering, and ultimately their reports. This should not limit the VAPCs' independence in reporting and making recommendations on other areas but should mean that they are working with the grain of the government's policy agenda.
48. An annual Chair's letter should also help with the frustration that the VAPCs expressed about the lack of feedback on their reports. It gives both parties a clear framework within which to set such feedback.

Recommendation 4 – the sponsor body should write to the VAPC Chair of Chairs annually setting out the priority areas for them to focus on for the coming year

Recommendation 5 – the sponsor body should provide detailed feedback on VAPC annual reports, with particular reference to how well they have delivered against the priority areas in the Chair's letter

Sponsorship

49. Both the VAPC chairs and the MOD officials I interviewed identified several areas where accountability and sponsorship were inadequate. Most VAPCs and MOD officials commended the improvements in engagement between the Committees and sponsor since new senior leadership was established within Armed Forces and Veterans Services. However, many identified that this had not always filtered down to more junior official levels, and there remained an "us vs them" relationship. The MOD was often seen as a passive sponsor.
50. The MOD does not hold the VAPCs to account for delivering against their objectives. Some noted that this was because the MOD does not want to interfere in the independence of the VAPCs, as well as the perceived conflict of being both sponsor and subject of the VAPCs' scrutiny. I return to this issue later when discussing where the VAPCs should sit within government.
51. Some elements of the sponsor relationship were seen by many to be working effectively. The bi-annual Chairs conferences allow the VAPCs to engage with the

Minister and MOD officials on an agenda of their choosing. The monthly data group on Armed Forces and Veterans Services performance, coupled with a chance to engage with departmental subject matter experts was also seen as useful by many. The VAPC Chairs and the MOD sponsor team also meet bi-monthly, but some interviewees noted that the agenda largely relies on what the MOD want to talk about. All VAPC chairs praised the administrative support that the MOD provided for making expenses claims, arranging conferences etc., even if some felt the ceilings for expenses were set too low.

52. The 2021 supplementary TORs were seen by most as a step forward, giving the VAPCs a clearer framework and direction. However, some interviewees believed it needed to go further and be put on a statutory footing. Several interviewees highlighted the broad nature of the TORs and the need for more specific direction from Ministers and officials. Many noted the challenge of the last 18 months with changes in the identity of the Minister and each having different priorities. Many VAPC chairs explained that it was helpful to have the current Minister set out his priorities at the last Chair's Conference in November 2022.

53. Despite the regular engagements outlined above I heard from many interviewees that the level of information sharing by the MOD to the VAPCs was insufficient. For the VAPCs to deliver on their statutory role they require a steady flow of information on the strategic and policy landscape. This is critical for their advocacy role, explaining government policy and support available for veterans and their families.

Recommendation 6 – the sponsor body should provide more focused and active sponsorship of the VAPCs, challenging, supporting, and holding them to account for delivering against their TORs and the recommended Chair's letter

Recommendation 7 – the sponsor body should improve information flows to the VAPCs, taking account of security restrictions. This should include, but not be limited to, protocols for sharing policy announcements and information in good time for the VAPCs to perform their advocacy role effectively

Where should the VAPCs sit within government?

54. The VAPCs remit has expanded significantly since they were first established as War Pensions Committees in 1921. The landscape in which they operate has changed since the creation of the Armed Forces Covenant in 2011 and the Office of Veterans' Affairs (OVA) in 2019. Their work has largely focused on areas relating to the Covenant, delivered mostly by other national and local bodies, but has more recently, moved into the wider veterans' space covered by the Strategy for our Veterans which is led by the OVA.

55. Some interviewees highlighted the perceived conflict of interest of being sponsored by the same body (Armed Forces Veterans Services) for who they are providing a scrutiny role. Some also raised whether the VAPCs should sit elsewhere within the MOD, for instance under the Armed Forces Covenant team. Or elsewhere in government such as under the Veterans' Commissioners / Independent Veterans Advisory, or the OVA. I discuss why I do not believe the Veterans Commissioners are the right home for the VAPCs at paragraph 117 when discussing alternative delivery models so do not repeat that here.
56. Based on my interviews, neither the VAPCs nor Armed Forces and Veterans Services believe they are the right sponsor body. As largely an operational delivery body, Armed Forces and Veterans Services does not have the levers to match the expanded remit of the VAPCs. Nor does it sit comfortably with either party to have the sponsor body subject to scrutiny from the VAPCs. I did not hear of significant improvements made by Armed Forces and Veterans Services that were driven by the work of the VAPCs so this is also not a reason for maintaining the status quo.
57. It is often the case in government departments that the sponsor role sits further outside of the direct line management chain of the body that is subject to scrutiny. For example, within another directorate. One option therefore could be to move the sponsor role elsewhere in MOD, perhaps under the Armed Forces Covenant team, as suggested by some interviewees. This could also be achieved as part of a model with a number of ALBs sitting with a specialist sponsor team. Any shift would need to come with sufficient resource and capability to be successful. Simply shifting responsibility will not in itself improve things.
58. Another option proposed by several interviewees is for the VAPCs being sponsored by the OVA, with a strong link to the Independent Veterans Advisor. But there were mixed views on this idea in the context of the current veteran's landscape.
59. The OVA has no delivery responsibilities and is there to provide a cross-cutting view and policy role for veterans. Having the "eyes and ears" of the VAPCs reporting to them on delivery for veterans by the many government actors involved could fit more appropriately with the VAPCs' broader remit. The Independent Veterans Advisor engages regularly with the VAPCs and explained that they are effective in providing him with a good understanding of a region, an honest assessment of what the issues are, and who to speak to. A model with the VAPCs sponsored by the OVA with a strong connection to the IVA could enable the IVA to direct the significant regional network of the VAPCs in gathering information and intelligence to inform national policy.
60. Some interviewees noted that the OVA is small (c.25 FTE), and is unlikely to have the resources to manage 12 VAPCs and actively sponsor them in the way that is required to get the most out of them. Again, any shift would need to come with sufficient resource and capability to be successful. A few interviewees noted that the MOD has been around for a considerable length of time whilst the OVA is relatively new. This raised questions over how enduring the OVA might be, and therefore the

impact on the VAPCs from being housed there. Whilst I understand this concern, I don't believe it should influence the question at hand given it is unclear at what point in the OVA's longevity this would cease to be an issue.

61. Whilst form should follow function and determining the VAPCs purpose first is critical, my view is that they would sit best being sponsored by the OVA because of the clear synergies with their cross-cutting role.

Recommendation 8 – the government should move the sponsorship role for the VAPCs to the OVA, and this must include sufficient Civil Service resource to deliver on the other recommendations in this report

Governance

62. Most interviewees felt that the governance arrangements at the regional committee level were clear. These are set out in the legislation and further codified in the VAPC Handbook. Many of the members saw the regional committees operating effectively day to day, with several stating that some have improved significantly from being in “disrepair”, “disintegrated”, or largely “dormant” a few years ago.
63. The National Committee of Chairs received more mixed views. Some felt it was working reasonably well, and that whilst its birth had been difficult, it had in recent years been a useful forum for bringing the regions together, including to draft the reports for Ministers. Some interviewees commented that bringing twelve regional committees representing very different localities together to try and come to common positions was always going to be difficult. Several people identified the fiercely guarded independence of each regional committee and that some Chairs did not want to relinquish this for a collective process of reporting to the Minister.
64. Underneath the National Committee, subcommittees are used to examine specific issues across regions e.g. health, housing. Some committee members raised concerns that at least one of the national subcommittees was not given due regard and time to present their findings at the National Committee meetings. This had caused some members of the subcommittees to step back and left some committees under resourced. Other interviewees highlighted the positive efforts made by the subcommittees and that these contributions were reflected in the VAPC reports.
65. There were some strong views on the need for reform of the Chair of Chairs (CoC) arrangements and there is internal work within the VAPCs to look at this. Many stressed that this was not a reflection on the existing CoC. The CoC role is not codified in any legislation or the Handbook and is not subject to any review

mechanism or formal election process. It was put in place by the VAPCs to collectively organise across the twelve committees and to have a single figurehead for the MOD and Ministers.

66. Interviewees highlighted that whilst the current CoC had generally played a positive role in bringing the regional chairs together, the lack of formal authority creates a tension and undermines collective working of the committees. As noted above, there was a feeling by some that several regional chairs guard their independence as regional committees and want to be able to engage with the Minister directly and regularly without going via the CoC. Some also noted that it is hard for the CoC to represent their regional interests alongside their national role, and that the workload of wearing both hats is significant for a volunteer.
67. To improve the national governance of the VAPCs I propose several changes. Firstly, that the CoC role should be formally set apart from the other chairs. It should not be first among equals, but rather a recognised role with clear accountability for bringing the collective view of the VAPCs to the MOD and Ministers. The Minister needs a single point of contact and cannot, and does not, engage effectively with twelve regional chairs on a regular basis.
68. Secondly, the CoC should be elected from the regional chairs to ensure they have sufficient experience of the work of the VAPCs.
69. Thirdly, upon appointment, the CoC should resign their role as a regional chair so that they do not have any conflicts of interest and can be seen to be representing the collective view. This will also help with the workload for the individual concerned and allow the position to be held by a wider set of individuals who maybe more time constrained but equally capable.
70. Fourthly, the maximum term for a CoC should be aligned with the length of member appointments (which I discuss below), with a possible extension of one year subject to majority agreement by the regional chairs.
71. Finally, these procedures and roles should be clearly codified in an appropriate format, including specific roles and responsibilities for the CoC.

Recommendation 9 – the government and VAPCs should implement the changes to the Chair of Chairs construct as set out in paragraphs 67-71

72. Another area raised by several interviewees was the size of the committees. The maximum of twenty people was argued to be too large and a lower figure more appropriate by some, with a suggestion of around twelve. Others felt the wide remit of the VAPC TORs necessitated the current size in order to cover the ground, and even then they could not cover it all.
73. There is clearly a balance to be struck here, and the recent challenges in recruiting is also a relevant factor as I highlight at para 97. As is the prospect of the VAPCs taking on a more formalised role in assisting AFCS claimants as per recommendation

2. At this stage reducing the maximum size of committees is not clear cut and flexibility is needed for committees that cover geographies with large numbers of veterans and / or many different local authorities.

74. I consider the maximum size of committees should remain at twenty. However, a reduction in the *minimum* number of members for a committee to be considered quorate is appropriate, if coupled with the more targeted remit for the VAPCs that I have recommended. This would give flexibility to committees to match the requirements of their geographical areas and the size of their veteran populations. Overall, this is likely to lower the average number of members across the committees. Transitioning to a smaller minimum size of committees should be gradual rather than ending appointments early.

Recommendation 10 – the government should reduce the minimum size of the Committees to eight members. This should be done over time rather than immediately and subject to a more targeted remit for the VAPCs

75. Several interviewees raised the need to extend the term for members and Chairs to five years, with one extension. They saw this as necessary because of the time it takes to build the local networks to be effective.

76. I have some sympathy with this argument but believe there is a balance to be struck with accelerating the progress of increasing the diversity of the VAPCs as I discuss below. A four-year term with one extension would be an appropriate balance, but only for new members.

Recommendation 11 – the government should increase the term of new members to four years, with the option to reappoint for a further four years subject to satisfactory appraisal

Diversity and the Composition of the Committees

77. All interviewees, including the Chairs, recognised that there is a challenge with diversity amongst the Committee members. Some committees are getting closer to mirroring society on some dimensions of diversity e.g. gender and ethnicity, but several others are a long way off.

78. Most Committees are made up of predominantly white, male ex-officers, which some interviewees felt led to a particular form of group-think, and was not as welcoming as it might be to people who were different from this. Some committees do have significant proportions of people with a non-military background, and some are managing to attract younger members as well. However, it is clear to all that more needs to be done to improve the diversity of the committees.

79. This is not straightforward as many interviewees noted. Much of the challenge lies with the diversity of people coming through the recruitment process and that VAPCs will naturally attract veterans, and those of a certain age, who were able to do unpaid volunteer roles. This highlights one of the biggest diversity issues: that there are very few committee members who are from the junior ranks of the armed forces. These are the veterans, and their families, most likely to need to regularly interact with local services and who the committee have limited lived experience of.
80. It was good to meet some members who have genuine lived experience, including facing difficulties interacting with the war pensions system. Some felt this enabled them to better engage with veterans by the simple fact they could understand what they were going through. Adding more people with this experience, alongside the more strategic experience of others would be beneficial.
81. I should note that there was a push to improve diversity in 2017 when government as a whole was concerned about diversity of ALBs. Many interviewees I spoke to felt things had improved. This needs to continue.

Recommendation 12 – the sponsor body and VAPCs should target recruitment for Committee members at groups who are under-represented on Committees

82. I now move on to cover the secondary areas, which are: Secretariat Support; Data and Evidence; IT Access; Recruitment, Skills and Experience; Appraisal; and, Devolution.

Secretariat support

83. Several VAPC members highlighted a lack of Civil Service secretariat support as a challenge. Each committee relies on one of its members to take minutes and organise meetings. Some argued that this was not the best use of volunteers' time, and they could be more effective if members could focus on other tasks.
84. I do not consider it would be appropriate for each of the twelve committees to have Civil Service secretariat support. This would be a considerable resource cost to the MOD and impact on the argument that VAPCs represent good value for money because their members are volunteers.
85. However, there is a case for greater professionalisation of the VAPCs and this should include such secretariat support for the formal Chair of Chairs role I describe above.

A capable Civil Service secretariat could play an important role in delivering on a number of the other areas I have focussed on, for example improving the impact of VAPC reports.

Recommendation 13 – the sponsor body should provide Civil Service secretariat support for the Chair of Chairs

Data and evidence

86. The veterans' space is not a data rich environment, and certainly not at the regional level in which the VAPCs operate. Many interviewees were hopeful that the new census data would help with this, but at present we do not have a good grasp on how many veterans there are and where they live.
87. As I highlight above, the MOD shares some performance data with the VAPCs, but several Chairs argued they need to understand the trends and have more granular data to be able to draw meaningful conclusions. Several also noted that the VAPCs could do more to share and compare information between regions themselves. Then aggregate this up to show a national picture, and where there is inconsistency in delivery and outcomes for veterans.
88. Many interviewees recognised the challenge of evidence in the VAPC reports. Several Chairs explained that they were relying on collections of anecdotes and individual experiences, rather than a higher standard of evidence. The MOD officials I interviewed were clear that this undermines the impact of the recommendations in VAPC reports as it is hard to determine what the weight of the evidence is.
89. This presents a challenge which if not addressed will leave the VAPCs in limbo, unable to provide the evidence needed to meet the MOD's bar, but in an environment where gathering the necessary data is very difficult. I do not consider that the VAPCs should be held to the same standard of evidence as Civil Servant policy makers would be. As one interviewee put it to me: "if we want to gather quantitative data or significantly more voluminous qualitative data then we need a different model to the VAPCs".
90. It is more appropriate to explore what is achievable by the VAPCs, which is certainly higher than current practice. For instance, VAPCs could conduct small scale surveys with standardised questions across regions. This may require some support from MOD officials. The VAPCs could also gather and pool information from 'town hall' meetings or similar events. And at the very least, the VAPCs should highlight on what basis they are making recommendations in their reports e.g. similar experiences heard across multiple regions.
91. I was encouraged that some VAPC members I spoke with were already thinking in this way and making connections with other actors in the veterans' space to understand what data could be shared. Some of these actors are nationwide and

engage thousands of veterans a year. It was noted by some interviewees that data sharing was not always forthcoming between different non-government stakeholders, and this needed to improve.

Recommendation 14 – the sponsor body should work with a dedicated group of VAPC members to define what appropriate evidence (and data collection) is needed to support their work and deliver impactful annual reports

Recommendation 15 – the VAPCs should ensure greater information sharing and comparing across regions to aggregate into an informative national picture

IT access

92. All VAPC members I interviewed highlighted the lack of VAPC-specific IT as a challenge. This ranged from VAPC email addresses to give credibility for members when engaging in the veterans' community, through to the ability to access and receive secure information from the MOD.

93. The MOD have also recognised this issue and are exploring what platform could be suitable for VAPCs within current security constraints. They are in discussion with the VAPCs about this, but one of the key sticking points remains the "@mod.gov.uk" suffix which existing systems require and which many VAPC members feel would not fit with their independence. A completely new system would come with a cost, and I do not consider this justified whilst the role of the VAPCs with the changing veterans' landscape is up for debate.

94. Whilst the use of an MOD email address is not ideal, the inability to share information securely with the VAPCs and for them to have a single platform for use across each committee and nationally is a greater hinderance. It is common for other arm's length bodies to piggyback off their sponsor department email systems, even where these bodies are, and need to be seen to be, independent.

Recommendation 16 – I ask the VAPCs to seriously consider using the system the MOD have offered, accepting the limitations, and ask the MoD to move quickly to implement it once it is accepted. This may need to be reviewed if my recommendation to move sponsorship to the OVA is accepted

Recruitment, and Skills and Experience

95. Every single VAPC member I spoke to highlighted recruitment as an issue. This is a challenging area because expectations about what should be done by the VAPCs and what is possible within the Public Appointments rules don't necessarily align.
96. Whilst most felt the process members and chairs went through was robust, they felt it was too slow. At present there is a pause on recruiting new committee members whilst the competition is run for the chair positions for the five committees with interim chairs in place. Some chairs explained that this had left them with diminished membership on their committees and unable to provide representation on the national subcommittees. However, there is a limit to the number of recruitments that the MoD team can run concurrently given resources, and they have focussed on reappointments and extensions during this time.
97. The aforementioned chairs' campaigns are struggling to attract significant numbers of applicants, despite very wide outreach to organisations within the veterans' space. Some interviewees felt a more targeted approach would bear greater fruit for the VAPCs. Some also felt that people were put off by the time requirement for a volunteer, and the lack of impact of the VAPCs at the national level. This may be part of a wider challenge finding volunteers that some interviewees identified in the charity sector and has seen the British Legion and SSAFA The Armed Forces Charity increasingly professionalising delivery and reducing their volunteer workforce.
98. Related to the composition of the committees is their skills and experience. All Chairs felt they had knowledgeable, skilled, and experienced members. Some with career experience in a range of relevant fields such as healthcare, housing, and finance. But as one Chair noted, it is hard to know exactly what skills they need on their committee without knowing in advance what the future priorities will be.
99. It is important for Chairs and the MoD to make full use of targeting recruitment adverts to any skills and capability gaps in committees, as well as to improve diversity across the members. Keeping an open mind on appointments, particularly where engaged and skilled people are from non-military or veteran backgrounds so that all committees can benefit from a wide range of experiences.
100. Several chairs explained that they had 'co-opted' members onto their committees as a way of compensating for lower numbers of formal members and as a way to bring specific expertise for certain initiatives. These co-opted members do not interfere with the formal governance of the Committees as they do not hold any formal status and cannot vote. In many cases Chairs said these co-opted members had added significant value and their intention was to ask them to apply for formal membership at the next recruitment round.

Recommendation 17 – VAPC Chairs should provide the sponsor body recruitment team with clear skills and diversity needs to include in recruitment materials

Appraisal

101. Appraisal of volunteers is not straightforward, but this is an area where a more consistent approach is required.
102. The VAPC Handbook for Chairs and Committee Members contains guidance on appraisal and templates for both chairs and members. Some chairs did note they used this process and the templates, but other Chairs and members explained that this is not consistent across the Committees.
103. When Chairs or members wish to be reappointed they must submit the self-assessment template, and the Governance Code on Public Appointments requires satisfactory performance as a condition of reappointment or extension. However, it is unclear whether anyone with sufficient knowledge of the members' performance reads or takes this into account, and there is no requirement for any countersigning (although some Chairs did say they had shared with the CoC and / or their committee members for views). Without some form of proper appraisal, a Chair who is presiding over a committee that is having limited impact will continue to do so for a further three years.
104. I should note that no interviewee raised any issues of poor behaviour, nor complaints about performance of any VAPC member.

Recommendation 18 – the sponsorship team should hold Chairs to account for appraising their members in-line with the Handbook guidance. And a sufficiently senior MOD person, with knowledge of the performance of the committee Chairs should review the self-assessment forms before reappointment is agreed

Devolution

105. It is not within my TORs to comment on the ins and outs of devolution in the veterans' space. But in talking to interviewees, particularly those from the devolved nations, what has come through is an uneasy fit with VAPCs appointed from Westminster working locally in Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland. Much of veterans' policy and delivery is devolved giving the VAPCs a distinct remit in the devolved nations than in England, in highlighting the different experiences of provision by devolved services for veterans.
106. When combined with the Veterans' Commissioners, for example in Scotland where the appointment is made by the Scottish Government, it can create confusion. Including for local stakeholders, who interviewees highlighted as often suspicious of the Westminster Government's role. In Wales, the role of Armed Forces Liaison Officers (AFLO) was also highlighted by some interviewees as a further complication

and diminution of the need for the VAPC there. Others though felt the AFLOs have a very different remit and because they are based in local authorities do not have the same independence as the VAPCs.

107. Although it is still early days for the Veterans' Commissioners, they are beginning to establish relationships with the VAPCs in their regions. However, this lack of clarity over responsibilities presents challenges for those I interviewed. At the National Committee level some Chairs also explained that it leaves devolved nation Chairs with less interest than their England counterparts on a large range of issues.

108. My comments here are focussed on the devolved nations, but a few interviewees did note that increasing devolution within England also needs to be considered, and this is an important argument for maintaining regional committees to reflect differences in both the veterans community and local governance.

Recommendation 19 – the sponsor body should consider whether the VAPCs TORs could support greater clarity for the Committees operating in the devolved nations

'Three tests'

109. One of the core remits of the Public Bodies Review Programme is to examine whether the ALB has a clear rationale for continuing at arm's length from government. This is different to the assessment on whether the body has a purpose or is effective which I cover above.

110. To remain at arm's length an ALB must pass at least one of the 'Three Tests':

- i) Is this a technical function, which needs external expertise to deliver?
- ii) Is this a function which needs to be, and be seen to be, delivered with political impartiality?
- iii) Is this a function that needs to be delivered independently of ministers to establish facts and/or figures with integrity?

111. Most interviewees did not believe that the VAPCs deliver a technical function, nor did the Committee members have particular technical knowledge. That is not to say they were not knowledgeable in a range of areas (including for some, pensions), but this is not critical to delivery of their functions. **The VAPCs do not meet this test.**

112. The majority of interviewees did consider that the VAPCs deliver a function that needs to be, and be seen to be, delivered with political impartiality. They felt this allowed them to speak truth to government at all levels, meant they did not have an agenda, and allowed them to establish relationships with veterans and the third sector free from political association and the challenges this can bring. Although some VAPC members I spoke to felt they were not independent enough, nor seen to

be given the lack of VAPC email addresses. There is a tension inherent in independence as the VAPCs look to Ministers to provide them direction and areas of focus. But this is not the same as directing what they report back from their evidence gathering and analysis. **I consider the VAPCs do meet this test.**

113. The third test was where there was the greatest divergence of opinions. Some interviewees felt that the VAPCs role is to independently establish facts and / or figures with integrity. However, others felt that whilst this is part of their role they are hampered by the lack of available data on veterans so establishing reliable facts and figures was difficult. **I consider this test partially met.**

Alternative Delivery Models

114. The 2016 Triennial Review recommended that the MOD engage with Cabinet Office officials to establish whether the VAPCs would benefit from reconstitution as Expert Committees. This was under emerging guidance at the time. I understand that the MOD and VAPCs discussed with the Cabinet Office and agreed to remain as an advisory ALB. I comment on this further below.
115. I have considered all alternative delivery models under the framework. My key assessments are that the role of the VAPCs could not be, in part, or wholly, delivered by local government, the voluntary sector, or via a commercial model. Each would lack independence and impartiality. For the same reasons bringing the VAPCs 'in-house' as civil servants within the MOD would be unsuitable.
116. I also considered whether the VAPCs' role could be discharged centrally, but this would be counter to what most interviewees described as the unique selling point of the VAPCs, their regionality. One interviewee did suggest reducing the number of VAPCs to allow for greater coordination, but this was not a view shared by others.
117. A case could be made for merging with the Veterans' Commissioners / the Independent Veterans' Advisor. Several interviewees note that there are some similar or complementary functions between the Commissioners and the VAPCs. As well as both having independence and impartiality. However, the different ways in which each Commissioner / Advisor is appointed and to whom they are accountable under devolution means that it would be complex to merge the VAPCs with them. For instance, in Scotland the VAPCs' role is very narrow, being exclusively focused on reserved matters, whilst the Commissioner has a much broader remit with most veterans' policy being devolved. Without changing the underpinning legislation, it will be more effective for the VAPCs and Commissioners to work closely together in discharging their responsibilities by sharing information and amplifying their networks.
118. On the specific idea from the 2016 Review of reconstituting the VAPCs as Expert Committees, I do not consider that this would be an appropriate classification

based on their current role set out in statute. The Public Bodies Handbook describes Expert Committees as follows¹¹:

These are usually non-statutory groups, providing independent expert advice on key issues from within the department. Like many of the NDPBs [non-departmental public bodies] that possess an advisory function, Expert Committees comprise of external (noncivil service) specialists that form committees to advise ministers on particular policy areas. However, they are not ALBs like NDPBs. They are funded from within a department budget, administrated and resourced by civil servants from within the department, and are not subject to the same levels of review or scrutiny that ALBs require.

119. Many people I interviewed highlighted that VAPC members are not necessarily experts in particular fields (although many are or have been in their careers), and that this is not necessary for the role. This contrasts with a scientific Expert Committee for example that might advise Ministers on a particular issue and may only exist until they have provided that advice.

120. The VAPCs are also statutory, and part of their role is to develop networks, and annually report on a range of issues. They also have a defined and enduring role in assisting individual veterans with problems or complaints regarding war pensions or the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme. The VAPCs are not designed to fall away when they have provided their advice or with a change of government as a non-statutory group would.

¹¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/519571/Classification-of-Public-Bodies-Guidance-for-Departments.pdf (p.20)

Conclusion

121. Based purely on the three tests, there is a rationale for the VAPCs remaining at arm's length from government. An advisory ALB model is the most appropriate delivery model under the current legislation.

Annex A – Review Terms of Reference

The Government is committed to delivering brilliant outcomes for the public. To achieve that ambition, public bodies must be accountable, efficient and effective and aligned to the Government's priorities. It has been 5 years since the last VAPCs review and the veterans' landscape in which it operates has changed, most notably through the introduction of the Strategy for our Veterans and its supporting action plans, the creation of the Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA) championing veterans at the heart of Government, and the introduction of the VAPC Supplementary Terms of Engagement 2021.

A departmental self-assessment of the VAPCs, in line with Cabinet Office guidance, has already highlighted governance, efficacy, and accountability issues. I am keen that your review looks at these in detail but also evaluates VAPCs performance and effectiveness as well as the efficiency and effectiveness of my department's sponsorship role. Your review will run in parallel with a government-supported Private Members' Bill (PMB) that seeks to reform the statutory basis of the VAPCs. The reforms being contemplated are small and sensible; for example, bringing VAPCs under the Armed Forces Act rather than remaining under the Social Security Act and widening the cohort with whom they can engage with to include all veterans and their families. While there is no guarantee the Bill will be successful in achieving Royal Assent during this Parliament, the outcome of your review will be key in identifying a clear way forward for the VAPCs.

Annex B – 2016 Triennial Review Recommendations

No	Recommendation
1	Resolution of Statutory and legislative requirements.
2	Reinforce Lord Ashcroft's recommendation to mobilise the VAPC by development of defined Terms of Reference to underpin the legislative framework.
3	Establish best practice from across the regions and identify the most effective way to share. (acknowledging regional differences).
4	Establish an annual Action Plan for each region, supported by Veterans UK and to inform annual reporting.
5	Fund holding is an outstanding concern that should be explored as a separate work stream with a view to prompt resolution.
6	Define annual reporting to Minister DPV.
7	Maintain annual recruitment round, targeting as appropriate and ensuring that follow up training is available as a priority
8	Confirmation of the procedures for the election and tenure of Chair of Chairs to be formalised.
9	Review Sponsor Team support to ensure compliance with Civil Service guidelines in terms of good Sponsorship guidance and future Cabinet Office requirements.
10	Review the role of the VAPC in the Independent Complaints Panel process.
11	Review of the VAPC Handbook .

12	As soon as guidance has been issued by the Cabinet Office on establishing Expert Committees as a viable alternative to ANDPBs, MOD officials to engage as a matter of priority with CO officials, to ensure the VAPCs are included in this process and establish if they would benefit from reconstitution as Expert Committees.
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