

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EAST MIDLANDS VETERANS ADVISORY AND PENSIONS COMMITTEE (EM VAPC) HELD AT THE OFFICERS' MESS, KENDREW BARRACKS ON 10 FEBRUARY 2025

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| Present | Barry Smith (BS) Philip Brooks-Stephenson (PBS) Helen Carter Andrew Holt (AH) Ron Moonesinghe (RM) Michael Whitehead (MW) David Houghton (DH) | Chair Industry/Transition Lead CJS Lead Communications Lead Secretary |
| Apologies | Karen Cox Ian Crowe Thomas Smith David Tomlinson (DT) Paul Drury (Co-opted Member) (PD) Stav Melides (Co-opted Member) (SM) | |
| Not Present | Ian Bustin | |
| In Attendance | Michael Smith (MOD Veterans' Services) Vanessa Plumley (RAF Families Federation) | |

| Item | | Action |
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| 1 | Welcome and Opening Remarks | |
| 1.1 | The Chair welcomed Members to the meeting, and extended his thanks to Lt Col Hughes, Commandant Kendrew Barracks, and Officers' Mess staff for facilitating and supporting the meeting. | |
| 2 | Apologies for Absence | |
| 2.1 | The Chair accepted pre-notified apologies from those who were unable to attend the meeting. | |
| 2.2 | While recognising and acknowledging the busy schedules of all the volunteer Members of the Committee, it was emphasised again that all current Members should seek to confirm their attendance or provide 'apologies for absence' ahead of future meetings. | All |
| 3 | Declarations of Interest | |
| 3.1 | There were no declarations of interest that would affect the work of the Committee. | |
| 4 | Veterans' Services (VS) Update | |
| 4.1 | The MOD VS representative provided an update on Veterans Welfare Service (VWS) (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/veterans-welfare-service) and Defence Transition Services (DTS) (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/help-and-support-for-service-leavers-and-their-families) issues and noted that, in response to the query raised by Members at the Committee's 21 Oct 24 Meeting, VS staffs were seeking additional information/data relating to the Defence Transition Referral Protocol (DTRP) (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/getting-additional-support-when-leaving-the-armed-forces) cases received by VS. Once such data is available it will be distributed to Members. | Sec |
| 4.2 | Members noted and supported the continuing work to develop 'new ways of working' within VS whereby DTS and VWS staffs would cross-train on roles in order to be able to better support veterans etc. The meeting also welcomed the establishment (from Apr 25) of a specific EM Field Team of 5-7 people lead by a Higher Executive Officer (HEO). | |
| 4.3 | Members were briefed on the VS-related National Work Allocation initiative | |

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| | that began on 10 Feb 25, which seeks to balance levels of work across VS regions and which, ultimately, aims to create a system whereby users access VS via a SPOC service. | |
| 4.4 | Members discussed the potential utility of VS representatives joining one of the regular online meetings of regional police forces that focuses on veterans/AF-related issues, in order to inform attendees of such a meeting about the capabilities/availability of VS. AH undertook to liaise with VS staffs to facilitate such an online meeting. | AH |
| 5 | RAF Families Federation (RAFFF) | |
| 5.1 | Members welcomed a briefing from a RAFFF https://www.raf-ff.org.uk/ colleague, and noted the areas of mutual interest/work between the VAPCs and the RAFFF, including a focus on the Armed Forces Covenant. | |
| 5.2 | Members noted the ‘signposting’ nature of the RAFFF’s support to veterans and the wider AF community, particularly in areas such as providing advice relating to support about accessing NHS services, housing issues, education and employment. The meeting was briefed that RAFFF staffs can provide support for individuals for 2 years after they leave the Service, irrespective of whether-or-not an individual is also being supported by DTS. | |
| 5.3 | The meeting was informed that the RAFFF Team comprises 12 people funded by the RAF but, importantly, not working for the RAF. Instead, the RAFFF is managed by the RAFA (https://rafa.org.uk/). Members discussed links/collaboration between the RAFFF, the Army Families Federation (https://aff.org.uk/) and the Naval Families Federation (https://nff.org.uk/), and noted the importance of personal/families from the individual Services having access to/support from a FF that understands the nature of their particular Service or circumstances. | |
| 6 | Minutes of Last Meeting and Actions Arising | |
| 6.1 | The Minutes of the last face-to-meeting held on 21 Oct 24, and the Record of Discussions from the online meeting held on 23 Dec 24 were accepted. | |
| 6.2 | Updates on Actions from the meeting held on 21 Oct 24 were provided during the individual Member reports/updates at Items 8, 9 and 10 . | |
| 7 | Recent Ministerial Engagement and Chairs’ Activity | |
| 7.1 | The Chair noted that the NCVC Chair had recently held a meeting with the Op VALOUR Task Force, providing them with a view of the current ‘as is position of VAPCs as well as a view of the future role and functions the committees could perform. The Chair also noted that Minister Veterans and People (Min V&P) had written to all of the VAPC Chairs in a Christmas message of thanks for our efforts, and also highlighted the Min’s level of engagement/activity in the veteran space. | |
| 7.2 | More broadly, Members noted that the Op VALOUR Task Force (the group tasked by Min V&P with reviewing all the services that support veterans and making recommendations as to how those services can/should be improved) had been scheduled to submit their Initial Report to Min V&P at the end of Jan 25. Members expressed their clear desire for sight of the Report when it is available. | |
| 8 | EM VAPC Input to Pan-VAPCs’ Report to Min V&P and Overall Report | |
| 8.1 | The Chair highlighted that the final iteration of the EM VAPC element of the pan-VAPCs’ 2025 Report to Min V&P had been completed, and thanked those Members who had provided inputs to the Report. Members noted that, as agreed at the EM VAPC online meeting held on 23 Dec 24, the EM VAPC element of the Report had drawn on the useful data provided by the | |

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| | <p>Veterans' Places, Pathways and People Programme Phase 2 consultation effort across the Midlands. It had provided information from veterans/AF community members and 3rd Sector organisations about how the various MOD initiatives in the veterans' support domain have affected/supported them. The meeting also discussed the highlighting of qualitatively-based examples of 'good' and 'bad' practice within the EM VAPC element of the Report.</p> | |
| 8.2 | <p>Outwith the 2025 Report, Members discussed the potential utility of drawing on broader expertise to inform future Reports, including groups such as the Female Veterans Transformation Programme (https://www.fvtp.org.uk/) and regional Community Voluntary Sector (CVS) County-specific groups (e.g. Nottingham https://www.nottinghamcvs.co.uk/ and Lincolnshire https://www.lincolnshirecvs.org.uk/ etc.).</p> | |
| 9 | Pan-VAPCs' Common Interest Groups (CIG) | |
| 9.1 | <p>Members noted that the role of the pan-VAPC CIGs was to influence policy makers/decisions by agreeing and tackling 2-3 key themes within each CIG area. The Chair and Sec highlighted that, should a Member of a particular CIG be unable to attend future EM VAPC Meetings, it would be appropriate for such a CIG Member to submit a <u>short</u> written update ahead of the meeting.</p> | CIG Members |
| 9.2 | <p>Members attending the meeting who are assigned as the EM VAPC representative on the pan-VAPCs' CIGs provided updates on the work of the CIGs.</p> | |
| 9.3 | Education CIG | |
| 9.3.1 | <p>The meeting discussed the difficulties of accessing information (e.g. utilisation of Service Pupil Premium https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-service-pupil-premium/service-pupil-premium-what-you-need-to-know; ensuring that children of Service personnel are not disadvantaged when their parents relocate to a new area as a consequence of their job; continuation of SEND provision for the children of Service personnel who relocate to a new area) relating to schools run by not-for-profit academy trusts rather than community schools (sometimes referred to as local authority schools https://www.gov.uk/typesof-school). Members noted that engagement from the Department for Education Regional Director (RD) for EM, Carol Gray (https://www.gov.uk/government/people/carol-gray) was key to gaining such understanding, and discussed the utility of inviting the EM RD to a future meeting. It was agreed that such an invitation would be issued.</p> | Chair PD |
| 9.4 | Housing CIG | |
| 9.4.1 | <p>The meeting noted that the Housing CIG had held its first meeting, which had drawn on some EM VAPC initiatives/strands of work relating to housing issues. Members also noted that a key strand of work for the Housing CIG may be investigating how to broaden the 'reach' of Op FORTITUDE (https://www.gov.uk/support-for-veterans/op-fortitude).</p> | |
| 9.5 | Law and the CJS CIG | |
| 9.5.1 | <p>AH noted that the CIG was meeting regularly and that its key themes/topics being addressed continued to include: agreeing/establishing protocols in all regional police forces relating to the employment of veterans and/or their partners; the rollout of best practice protocols (FORCER) for when a</p> | |

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| | veteran is reported as being missing; mentoring of new police service members with a military background by former SP within their force. | |
| 9.5.2 | Members were also briefed about the work by the Law and CJS CIG to establish engagement with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (https://www.apccs.police.uk/) (similar to the engagement already established with the National Police Chiefs' Council (https://www.npcc.police.uk/)), which was making progress. AH noted that Sarah Taylor, Norfolk Police and Crime Commissioner (https://www.norfolk-pcc.gov.uk/who-we-are/your-pcc/) would act as the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners' lead for such engagement. | |
| 9.6 | Support CIG | |
| 9.6.1 | DH informed the meeting that the Support CIG continued to meet on a regular basis to develop a focus on sharing best practice across the VAPCs and pan-VAPC administration and internal training issues. Members noted that DT had agreed to utilise his skills to support the development of training/'on boarding' programmes for VAPC Members. | DT |
| 10 | Individual Member Reports – Updates | |
| 10.1 | Regional Armed Forces Covenant Partnership Boards (AFCPB) | |
| 10.1.1 | Members allocated/assigned to individual EM AFCPBs provided updates on continuing work, emerging issues and new initiatives from their respective AFCPBs. The Chair and Sec highlighted that, should a Member of a particular AFCPB be unable to attend future EM VAPC Meetings, it would be appropriate for such a Member to submit a <u>short</u> written update ahead of the meeting. | AFCPB Members |
| 10.1.2 | The meeting noted the long-awaited (and oft-hastened) improvement in the engagement of the Northants ICB within the Northamptonshire AFCPB, in relation to the ICB's plans to address its Duty of Due Regard etc. Members also noted that the recent Northants AFCPB had highlighted a seeming lack of knowledge among some potentially relevant civilian organisations regarding the Armed Forces Domestic Abuse Handbook for Civilian Support Services (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/armed-forces-domestic-abuse-a-handbook-for-civilian-support-services/armed-forces-domestic-abuse-a-handbook-for-civilian-support-services). Members were encouraged to publicise this useful resource within their respective AFCPBs/networks. | AFCPB Members |
| 10.1.3 | Members expressed their disappointment that any progress being made by the Derbyshire AFCPB seems to have stalled, as the group has not met for some time (the most recent Derbyshire AFCPB Meeting scheduled for Jan 25 was cancelled). In contrast, the meeting welcomed the continuing positive level of engagement within, and evolution of, the LLR AFCPB. | |
| 10.1.4 | The meeting noted that a major challenge within the Lincolnshire area was a lack of district council-owned housing. Moreover, Members also noted that not a single housing-related bid for AFC Fund Trust (https://covenantfund.org.uk/) funding had been successfully made from Lincolnshire. A number initiatives and new partnerships were being pursued within the County led by the Chair following the last Partnership Board meeting. Members noted the positive work undertaken by a Lincolnshire AFCPB Task and Finish Group to define the AFCPB's aims and objectives, and encouraged members of other EM AFCPBs to utilise the document within their respective organisations. | AFCPB Members |

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| 10.2 | In relation to non-AFCPB individual Lead Member reports, the Chair and Sec highlighted that, should a Member be unable to attend future EM VAPC Meetings, it would be appropriate for such a Lead Member to submit a <u>short</u> written update ahead of the meeting. | Lead Members |
| 10.3 | Health | |
| 10.3.1 | The meeting discussed and supported the need for ICBs to have a degree of freedom to establish pilots relevant to their veteran/AF community demographic profile. Members viewed the example of Lincolnshire ICB's establishment of a 2-year Military Maternity Project (https://www.nhsconfed.org/case-studies/support-military-families-around-pregnancy-birth-and-beyond ; https://www.betterbirthlincolnshire.co.uk/military-maternity-project) as an example of how such focused pilot programmes can support specific veteran/AF community groups. | |
| 10.4 | Industry/Transition | |
| 10.4.1 | Members noted the recent information circulated regarding the National Transition Event being held at Silverstone on 24 Feb 25 (https://www.nationaltransitionevent.com/). | |
| 10.4.2 | The meeting discussed the revised strategy for AF Covenant signatories (https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/show-your-support/sign-the-covenant/) whereby AF Covenant signatories will be grouped into 1 of 3 tiers. Members also noted that PBS is seeking information/clarification as to what the focus of the regional Employer Recognition Scheme (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defence-employer-recognition-scheme) Gold Award Holders Association is, and had sought a meeting with Defence Relationship Management (DRM) (https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/defence-relationship-management#:~:text=Employer%20Recognition%20Scheme,-Organisations%20who%20take&text=These%20awards%20are%20a%20public,them%20for%20an%20ERS%20award .) to discuss the way ahead for the Association. | PBS |
| 10.4.3 | Members noted that SM has now ended his tenure as a full Member of the EM VAPC, but has agreed to continue to support the Committee's work as a Committee alumnus. Members expressed their appreciation for SM's excellent work to support veterans/the wider AF community, and for his enduring support in his alumnus role. | |
| 10.5 | CJS | |
| 10.5.1 | The meeting noted that Op NOVA (https://www.gov.uk/support-for-veterans/op-nova) staffs had seen the number of Service leavers referred to them who already with criminal records double in a relatively short space of time. Members discussed possible reasons for such a shift, which may potentially include previous changes in recruitment and/or retention policies within the individual Services. | |
| 10.6 | Housing | |
| 10.6.1 | Members noted and welcomed 3 specific initiatives being undertaken to try and provide greater provision of accommodation for veterans and the AF community: ex-RAF Manby; ex-RAF Scampton | |

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| | https://www.westlindsey.gov.uk/council-news/2024/12/council-renews-interest-acquire-former-raf-scampton-site-following-home-office-sale-decision); former NHS site at Cross-O-Cliff (https://www.lincolnshirelife.co.uk/lifestyle/formerhospital-site-development-well-under-way/). | |
| 11 | AOB | |
| 11.1 | BS highlighted that his extended tenure as Chair of the EM VAPC will end on 17 Mar 25. As the Government's process to advertise for a new EM VAPC Chair had still not been initiated, IC would act as the Committee's Interim Chair wef 17 Mar 25. However, given the continued lack of progress from the Government relating to advertising for/appointing a new Chair (and Members), BS has kindly agreed to remain with the Committee (as a Co-opted Member) to support the Interim Chair and the Committee's continuing work. Members expressed their heartfelt thanks to BS for his unstinting efforts as the Committee's Chair, and for his unwavering, highly-effective and continuing work to support veterans, the AF community and the EM VAPC. | |
| 11.2 | It was confirmed that DH's extended appointment to the EM VAPC expires on 01 Mar 25. Members noted that RM has agreed to take-over from DH as the 'lead' within the EM VAPC for Northamptonshire-related matters. Members also noted that MW had agreed to assume the role of Secretary to the EM VAPC from DH wef 01 Mar 25. Members expressed their sincere appreciation to DH for his unsparing, insightful and invaluable support to veterans, the wider AF Community and the EM VAPC. | RM MW |
| 12 | Date of Next Meeting | |
| 12.1 | The next EM VAPC meeting will be a face-to-face meeting, and will take place on 16 Jun 25 from 1030 hours at Kendrew Barracks (TBC). | All |

Signed electronically

D A HOUGHTON
Secretary, EM VAPC