

MINUTES OF THE EASTERN VETERANS ADVISORY & PENSIONS COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD VIRTUALLY – FRI 21 FEB 2025 AT 1400

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| Present: Malcolm Johnston (MJ) Stuart Blackburn (SB) Diane Palmer (DP) Barrie Griffiths (BG) Darren Hickie (DH) Kath Hutton (KH) | Tenure Full Full Full Full Co-opted Full | Role: Chair Chair UKCVC/Norfolk Health Herts/Cambs VPPP – Thrive Together East Anglia Suffolk/Welfare/Sec |
| Apologies: Andrew Catton (AC) Stephen Heard (SH) Philip Wilson (PW) Ian Andrews (IA) | Full Full Co-opted Full | Suffolk/Housing Norfolk/Health Essex Law |
| Not Present: Chris Ali Rob Catton James Clark Esme Cole Sean Costello | Co-opted Co-opted Full Full Full | Essex/Support Law Finance Essex/Housing |
| Resignations: Paul Weaver-Smith Sean Howlett Robyn Lockwood | Co-opted Full Co-opted | Finance Support |

| Item | Discussion | Action |
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| 1. Welcome & Introduction from Chair | <p>a. MJ welcomed KH as the new Sec. She will take the minutes of this meeting.</p> <p>b. Apologies as listed above. Resignations had also been received as above. In addition to those listed, Sean Costello, James Clark, and Esme Cole will not be remaining after the end of their tenures in May. DP is also standing down as Vice Chair.</p> <p>c. The report to the Minister was submitted by the deadline, thanks to those who provided input. SB is hoping for feedback shortly.</p> <p>d. Update on current national situation by SB:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Op Valour – SB has engaged with the 1* mil and 1*civ, report is awaiting finalisation. It is hoped that much better use will be made of the VAPCs. ○ IT/Emails – several members now have their Defence Gateway email addresses. MJ is looking at how these can be accessed through Outlook. The next task is to look at storage capability to provide joint storage. For the present continue to use civilian email addresses but cc the DG addresses until we are sure that all members of EVAPC have set up their DG mail. ○ Recruitment – members are being lost from the region and nationally. Manning is a critical issue, esp in NI. The Minister hopes to make a decision in the Spring as to the way forward. All members are requested to consider useful potential members in their networks. ○ Social Media – all members were requested to exercise caution and avoid posting or commenting on inflammatory content. | All |

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| 2. County Updates | <p>a. Suffolk Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attended RBL Suffolk Conference 25 Jan. New Chair in post. Branch Community Support in utter disarray. Hoping to re-establish in Beccles. • Met with NSFT Admiral Nurses – dementia support in Norfolk & Waveney. RBL also have ANs working in the area but not joined up service! <p>Key Activities for Next Period</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AFCPB Suffolk – 13 March – way ahead on new Suffolk AF Commissioner. Action: when known please introduce to PW for Essex. • Thrive Together programme commences. • Planning now for VE80/VJ80. • Suffolk CC to update its AFC pledge and encourage DCs to do the same. <p>Strategy Milestones</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Veterans in Care Homes – commences 1 April in James Paget catchment area under Thrive Together. <p>Discussion – it is worth a get together for all AF Commissioners/Champions? Possibly invite to June f2f meeting. BG advised wait until VAPC has a clearer remit. MJ decided to plan something for June, pending the Ministers response to the VAPC annual report.</p> <p>b. Norfolk Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norfolk only have 12 GP practices that are not accredited as Veteran Friendly covering 4,839 veterans plus their dependents. • NCC AFCB agreed a budget reduction of 50% (£20k to £20k) from NCC for the AFCB in 2025/26. • Discussed link between housing need and health / mental health challenges. • County update provided on the following AFCB projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Finding veterans lost in the care sector. ○ Housing need. ○ Collaboration in the charity sector. <p>Key Activities for Next Period</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aim to achieve 100% VF accreditation for all Norfolk and Waveney ICB practices. • Attend March AFCB meeting. • Analysis the impact on increased VF practices to referrals to Op Courage etc. <p>Strategy Milestones</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distributed ONS report on how data helped Norfolk County Council (NCC) used Census 2021 data as evidence to provide support for their armed forces community. • Distributed following to NCC AFCB members. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ VAPC response to the Defence Select Committee Inquiry ○ University of Salford report on Veterans, trauma and the UK benefits system to NCC AFCB members. | <p>KH</p> <p>MJ/KH</p> |
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- UK Government Finance and Housing Analysis of UK Armed Forces Veterans

East of England Thrive Together

Update

- Models created and being tested for Local Hubs and Drop-ins, find Veterans in Care Homes.
- 5 of 6 projects funded.
- 11 projects awarded across the region:
 - 1. Local Hubs & Drop-ins
 - 2. Mobile Awareness Stands
 - 3. Transport accessibility programmes
 - 4. Mental Health Stigma Reduction
 - 5. Self-esteem & Identity Programmes
 - 6. Find Veterans in Care Homes

Key Activities for Next Period

- Confirm some funded projects.
- Complete conference bookings.
- Complete the Veterans Voice site and publicise.
- Develop Thrive Together member's site and test.
- Meeting with Norfolk Armed Forces Commissioner.
- Discuss how Ripple Pond can support our region.
- Present to Hertfordshire AF Board.
- Present to Norfolk AF Board.
- Cambridge & Peterborough AF Covenant Partnership Board.
- Essex Veterans working Group.

Strategy Milestones

- Building of regional network by identifying key people to join the quarterly meeting.
- Set up regional training/workshop on either Finance for Charities or Addiction for all.
- Win awarded for LGBT+ resource for region.

Risks

- Too many people book onto conference/ getting the current people.
- Minister invited might not make it.

List of Funded Projects

| Organisations | Project 1 - Local Hubs and Drop-ins | Project 2 - Mobile Awareness Stands | Project 3 - Transport Accessibility Programmes | Project 4 - Mental Health Stigma Reduction | Project 5 - Self-esteem and Identity Programmes | Project 6 - Finding Veterans in Care Homes |
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| Combat2Coffee | | Suffolk & Essex | | | | |
| James Paget University Hospital | Norfolk - East | | | | | Norfolk - East |
| Mid and South Essex NHS FT | Essex | | | | | |
| Suffolk Family Carers | Suffolk | | | | | |
| The Poppy Factory | | | | | East of England | |
| Veterans Central | Norfolk, Cambs & P'boro | Norfolk, Cambs & P'boro | | | | |
| Veterans Community Network | Bedford, Luton & Milton Keynes | Bedford, Luton & Milton Keynes | | Bedford, Luton & Milton Keynes | | Bedford, Luton & Milton Keynes |
| Remaining to allocate | | 25% to allocate in Hertfordshire | Reviewing | 67% to allocate in other counties | 50% to allocate in other counties | |

Discussion – working to ensure no overlap between projects/areas. Not all funding has yet been allocated, see slide above for gaps. The conference is confirmed as 24 Apr in

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| | <p>Newmarket, invitations are being sent out, DH to ensure all EVAPC members are invited. BG suggested all members must make their networks aware of the Thrive Together programme and the opportunities offered. DH also to share Veterans Voice link and to pass SB a TT link for NI.</p> <p>c. Hertfordshire</p> <p>Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Healthwatch Herts surveying healthcare experience of AFC. ○ Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board 2024-2025 Action Plan ○ With demise of Veterans Gateway, 170 services now mapped on Forces Connect App. ○ After 7 years of no bids, submitting funding bid for Carers in Herts to fund a dedicated worker to better engage AFC. <p>Key Activities for Next Period</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Encourage a more challenging/stretching Covenant Board Action Plan ○ Next Herts Covenant Board (6 monthly) F2F – 5 Mar 25 ○ Continue to promote good practice from other regions to encourage Herts to do more than the minimum of AFC engagement – citing lack of dedicated resources. <p>Risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Board perceived as a passive facilitation grouping. Provides no member/stakeholder direction or holding to account. Drive comes from 3 Sub Gp Leads: Housing, Health and Education. ○ Lack of proactivity and drive evident in Herts model of delivery ie no dedicated Covenant Lead. No consequences of lack of Champion engagement. ○ Increasing focus on cadet activities despite cadets not being part of the AFC. ○ Lack of engagement by most Armed Forces Champions. Not seen as important except where individuals have a reason to care personally. <p>Action – BG/DH to liaise for a presentation to Herts AFB.</p> | DH |
| | <p>d. Cambridgeshire & Peterborough</p> <p>Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cambridgeshire Insights. Website for AFC, include document library. District and City Council Covenant Action Plans will be uploaded. ○ Priority is getting organisations, including Parish Councils, to sign up to Covenant. Effect ? ○ Veteran Friendly Framework. Actively encouraging Cambs and Peterborough based care homes to seek VFF accreditation. ○ Covenant Officer renamed Armed Forces Covenant Partnership Coordinator <p>Key Activities for Next Period</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Encouraging Cambs and Peterborough to undertake Joint Strategic Needs Assessment ○ Encourage training for all Armed Forces Champions. | BG/DH |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Next Cambs and Peterborough Partnership Bd – 20 Mar 25. <p>Risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Single point of success/failure is Partnership Coordinator. ○ Lack of leadership. ○ Continues to operate as a networking meeting <p>e. Bedfordshire – no report</p> <p>f. Essex</p> <p>Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Essex CMPB is not due to meet until later in the year. Therefore, limited activity in this period. ○ Healthwatch Essex Veteran's Working Group met on 9th January where presentations were received from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Break Even – Battling the Odds a forces gambling addiction charity. ○ Op Courage, Liana Basham ○ West Essex Veterans' research project – Lily Boag ○ Update from ECC by Luke French ○ A representative from Essex Police was on the VWG call representing veterans' services in the Police. When asked about the Forcer Protocol, he denied knowledge, despite the fact that Essex Police had adopted the protocol at a high level.. I subsequently mentioned this to Roger Hurst, Essex PFCC and assured me that he would look into it. <p>Key Activities for Next Period</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continue ongoing liaison with District AFC leads <p>Strategy Milestones</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure ECC continues to liaise with schools in an effective way ○ Exert pressure on housing authorities to make housing available to service leavers, regardless of their geographical links ○ Support Luke French ECC/CMPB to reach CMPB's objectives <p>Risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure ECC continues to liaise with schools in an effective way ○ Exert pressure on housing authorities to make housing available to service leavers, regardless of their geographical links ○ Support Luke French ECC/CMPB to reach CMPB's objectives | |
| 3. Functional / Common Interest Groups (CIG) Updates | <p>a. Employment & Transition – no report</p> <p>b. Finance – no report</p> <p>c. Health & Wellbeing</p> <p>Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 190,903 (85.82%) of regional veterans now have access to a VF accredited practice with 31,521 (14.17%) are denied this access bringing into question inequality for veterans and their dependents. | |

- Anticipated that SNEE ICB will achieve 100% accreditation of all practices by end of Feb 25 and C&P ICB by end of March.
- Two South West England ICBs (Cornwall and Somerset) now have 100% of practices accredited as veteran friendly!
- 1,278 / 1,285 PCNs (99.46%) have at least one practice accredited, the same as last week. **Just 7 remaining nationally.**

Key Activities for Next Period

- Prepare to cease work on the VF accreditation programme and ensure smooth transition to whatever is in place.
- Prepare presentation for Thrive Together Conference April 24th.

Strategy Milestones

- As of 19th Feb 25, the NHSE VF accreditation programme contract with Arden & GEM CSU will cease to be funded as 100% of PCN's have at least one VF accredited practice.
- Met with Shiela Fox from Herts WWTW to make virtual introductions.
- Circulated request from ARU Medical School and the Veterans and Families Institute to all regional Primary Care contacts to support survey on the care needs of veterans and the OP RESTORE.

Attended

- QEH Armed Forces Network Meeting
- Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Board Workshop.
- AF Reserves Community Connect Trust Stories: The Role of Collaboration in Supporting Armed Forces Reservists

| ICB | Practices | | | Est Veterans with no VF practice |
|----------------|-----------|-----|------------|----------------------------------|
| | Total | Yes | No | |
| SNEE | 91 | 90 | 1 | 423 |
| C&P | 86 | 80 | 6 | 2,071 |
| N&W | 105 | 93 | 12 | 4,839 |
| BLMK | 87 | 64 | 23 | 5,119 |
| MSE | 145 | 99 | 46 | 7,934 |
| HWE | 127 | 77 | 49 | 11,135 |
| Totals | 641 | 503 | 137 | 31,521 |

Discussion – DP is to co-Chair the H&W CIG with Chris Mason, commencing in April. A letter will go out to VAPC members to join the newly formed group, hopefully with membership to cover the UK evenly. TORs in draft. DP will in the future update this committee with a separate slide.

d. Housing

Update

- No further forward with establishing a national 'housing' sub-group as Patrick Lyster-Todd still currently only four of us and really wants to find 5+ before we start to meet (virtually) and become active.

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Chasing District Councils in Suffolk (with view of contacting other authorities in Eastern Region thereafter) to ascertain which (what percentage) DC's in each region: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ a - Have an AFC officer ○ b - Have an AF Champion at Cllr level ○ c - Have a statement in their housing policy that refers to the AF Covenant, acknowledges the duty of care mandated on LAs and clearly shows that veterans and their families are not being disadvantaged. ○ All to identify a baseline / collect data from which we could aim to hold them to account and improve performance in future. Currently have very poor responses and identifying best point of contact with each Authority. Will continue. <p>Key Activities for Next Period</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Will continue to chase and progress the items listed under Function update. ○ Seek to hand-over to incoming 'housing' lead once confirmation of appointment to role. <p>e. Veterans & The Law – no report</p> <p>f. Welfare</p> <p>Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ H&W sub group still in abeyance. ○ RNA Area 5 (Norfolk/Suffolk/Essex) – new area Welfare/Wellbeing rep to reinvigorate in the area. <p>Key Activities for Next Period</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Looking at the Veterans in Care Homes initiative. <p>Risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Jan 2025 – James Paget has also cut the Armed Forces Advocate Role. Whilst provision still exists in the Armed Forces Community Support function, face to face time for veterans in the hospital has significantly reduced. I attended the AFCFT webinar on the AFA project – lots of back slapping over how well it went but no plans to continue funding or roll out further by NHS England. ○ Funding – starting to see funding reductions, services are drawing down – eg, Outside The Wire drug & alcohol service manpower reduction in Norfolk/Suffolk ○ Lack of organisations with community volunteers willing to befriend/visit isolated older veterans. ○ Attendance at support and social groups - transport issues, veterans isolated, housebound ○ Caseworkers remote and older veterans not online. <p>g. Update on VWS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ From Jonathan Price – Field Team Manager AFVS. <i>"We are currently in a period of organisational restructuring. We are moving from four national regions (Jon's area covers Midlands and Wales), to 12 smaller "Field Teams". By the Time Nicky Yianni is trained, it is likely that these Field Team managers will be in place, and the responsibility to engage with VAPCs will sit with them. In addition, we are awaiting an organisational name change</i> | |
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| | <i>to be approved. VWS and DTS will be going. In the interim we are going by "Veterans Services"™.</i> | |
| 4. Personnel / Committee Management Issues | <p>a. Roles of Secretary & Vice Chair - MJ thanked KH for stepping up vice Robyn Lockwood as Sec. There is now also a vacancy for Vice Chair.</p> <p>b. Meeting dates – MJ/KH to look at rearranging some dates. It looks like Mons or Weds are best. Post meeting note – Chair has agreed last Mon of the month for meetings. Sec to look at dates and resend.</p> <p>c. Membership changes since last meeting - Diane Palmer steps down as VC, Sean Howlett, Paul Weaver-Smith & Robyn Lockwood resignations, Sean Costello, James Clark, Esme Cole not staying on after May. Need new leads on Housing, Finance, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, 2i/c for Health and for Norfolk, Vice-Chair. As at Item 1d, All members are requested to consider useful potential members in their networks as co-optees and discuss any possibilities with the Chair.</p> <p>d. Co-opted members. New members can be co-opted until the recruitment freeze is off.</p> <p>e. Meeting dates when Chair unavailable and subs needed – see below and consider volunteering if you are able:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 4th/ 5th March – a UKCVC meeting that will potentially be over two days at the AFVS centre in Norcross (Blackpool). ○ 25th April – EVAPC virtual meeting. ○ 11th June EVAPC preparatory meeting and UKCVC meeting. ○ 9th July UKCVC. ○ 22nd August EVAPC virtual meeting. | MJ/KH |
| 5. AOB | <p>a. MJ to re-do the VAC logo into a VAPC logo and add to email signature block and to the template for our slides.</p> <p>b. MJ to raise Thrive Together at next UKCVC meeting to encourage all Chairs to engage.</p> | MJ MJ |
| 6. DONM | Virtual - currently Fri 25 Apr @ 1400 but may change to Mon 28 Apr. Post meeting Note – DONM is Mon 28 Apr at 1400. | |