

MINUTES OF THE EASTERN VETERANS ADVISORY & PENSIONS COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD FACE TO FACE AT ARC CAMBRIDGE – MON 30 JUNE 2025 AT 1030

Present: Malcolm Johnston (MJ) Stuart Blackburn (SB) Barrie Griffiths (BG) Darren Hickie (DH) Stephen Heard (SH) Kath Hutton (KH)	Tenure Full Full Full Full Full Full	Role: Chair Chair UKCVC/Norfolk Herts/Cambs (attended on MS Teams) VPPP – Thrive Together East Anglia Norfolk/Health Suffolk/Welfare/Sec
Apologies: Diane Palmer (DP) Andrew Catton (AC) Philip Wilson (PW) Ian Andrews (IA) Ben Conway	Full Full Co-opted Full Co-opted	Health Suffolk/Housing Essex Law
Not Present: Chris Ali Rob Catton	Co-opted Co-opted	Essex/Support Law

Item	Discussion	Action
1. Welcome & Introduction from Chair	a. Apologies as listed above. b. SB, SH and KH have been given short extensions. MJ to contact those members from whom we have not heard for some to affirm their intention to continue so that they may be removed from the distribution if necessary. There was no change to the current stance on recruitment.	MJ
2. National/ Regional level issues	a. Report to Minister, OVA meetings and future of VAPCs. Lots of work had been done to produce a report for the Minister and this had been submitted. MJ felt that if there is no positive intent to integrate the VAPCs with Op Valour then there is little point in continuing. SB commented that the submission of the paper had not been straightforward. After the original face to face meeting, a draft had been produced. A first meeting with the OVA had not been constructive. At a second meeting, it was revealed that 30 valour regional field officers were to be created but these were not going to be veteran facing but rather to gather strategic intelligence for the OVA. The due date of the VAPC paper was not confirmed but assumed to be 3 Jun. Another draft was produced after further consultation and the due date then changed to 30 Jun. Then the paper was asked for by 20 Jun for the OVA to comment on it by 30 Jun. SB asked for a third meeting at which it was clear there was still no agreement over what the paper should contain. However, the discussion did agree that they would try to ensure that the genuine requirement for the VAPC was not ignored. A hard copy of the final paper was sent to the Minister by recorded delivery but there is a concern that it would not necessarily even be put before the Minister. SB has sent a personal letter to the Minister, however despite acknowledgement from the outer office, SB is still not convinced that the Minister has read any of it. <u>Discussion:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• BG thanked SB and the UKCVC for their hard work.• SB reported that there are other persons of influence that can be written to if the need arose.	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DH asked how the Thrive Together delivery fits into the Op Valour model – there is no clarity on the structure at present and devolution is also a complicating factor as local authorities evolve and restructure. <p>b. Thrive Together Update.</p> <p>Eastern Regional Update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Models created and being consulted for Local Hubs and Drop-ins, find Veterans in Care Homes. • 12 projects awarded across the region. • New EOI sent to Herts, Cambs and Essex for the following projects: <p>Action – please copy EOIs to PW & BG:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mobile Awareness Stands ○ Mental Health Stigma Reduction ○ Self-esteem & Identity Programmes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sending out regular monthly and mid-month update newsletters to the region. <p>Action – KH to send to EVAPC members.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attended the Cambridge and Peterborough Covenant Partnership board meeting. • House of Lords – PTSD Resolution mentioned Thrive Together. • Met and talked to Ali Carnes about Thrive Together and VALOR at Big Breakfast in Ipswich. • Sustainability meetings for regional report due 30 July. <p>Key activities for next period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armed Forces Network meeting to look at merging. • Meeting with Frontline to merge professional networks. • Bedford Covenant Board meeting. • Submit AFCFT quarterly report. • Norfolk Armed Forces Commissioner presentation to bring together military and civilian charities to discuss how to build collaboration between them in Norfolk. • Essex Veterans Working Group. • Review 7 project applications for funding. • Start the process of awarding the transport project. <p>Action – All send details to DH of any community transport organisations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit the regional sustainability report. • Armed Forces Covenant Group Sub Health Group. <p>Strategy milestones</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the Veterans Community Worker for LGBT+ resource for region. • Set up regional training/workshop. • Continue sending Thrive Together newsletters. • Agreed on next steps for professional network. <p>Risks / Issues / Escalations / Decisions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excluded from MK Blue Light Hub. • Uncertainty about what VALOUR is delivering. • Award of 7 funded projects.
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3. County Updates	<p>a. Suffolk - KH.</p> <p>County Update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 Mar Attended Suffolk AFCPB at Wattisham. New AF Commissioner - Andrew Smith, SSAFA Suffolk Chair and Lt Col ACF. Presentation by ABF – 200 cases in East Anglia worth £165K, 60% of cases in age ranges 36-49 and 66-97. DWP looking at more veterans in custody. • East Suffolk Council realised that their AFC had lapsed, resigning and working to Silver. • Combat to Coffee new location in Colchester. • Since its inception, Suffolk AFCPB has secured £2.8M in funding for projects in the Suffolk AF community. <p>Action – PW to note and determine if Essex CMPB has done similar.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VE80 events and other representational. New RN memorial dedicated in BSE. • Thrive Together – 4 groups now running in Beccles/Lowestoft/Gorleston – 1 per week. • Thrive Together Veterans in Care Homes project – 79 identified in JP area of operation. <p>Action – KH send VFF to EVAPC members.</p> <p>Action – BC and IA to work with County reps to identify care homes and care home companies by County and email the MDs to introduce them to VFF then approach RBL County Chairs and encourage local branches to engage as follow up to this initiative.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RNA invigoration of branch welfare & wellbeing role. KH is now Area 5 WWO – covering Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk. • 25 Jun - Armed Forces Day event at JP. <p>Key activities for next period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attending Norfolk Care Association Residential Sub-Group 8 Jul. • Suffolk AFCPB at RAF Honington - 10 Jul. • DWP Work & Wellbeing event in Norwich in July – no details yet. • NSFT/Royal Anglians Veterans Open Day 12 Aug – Ickworth. • Suffolk VJ80 Service, BSE – 15 Aug. <p>Strategy milestones:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with new Suffolk AF Commissioner. <p>Risks / Issues / Escalations / Decisions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • James Paget Hospital Armed Forces Support contract ends 31 Aug 2026. Nothing in hospital strategic plan for replacement/continuation. <p>b. Norfolk - SH.</p> <p>County Update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported financial bid for QDG Families Day in August 25. • Represented EVAPC at QDG Charity boxing event at Robertson Barracks. • Provided events information for the Norfolk and Norwich NHS FT Military Community Working Group.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presented at national Patent Safety Network about patient safety for veterans and their families as a significant minority patient group. <p>Key activities for next period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stand in for Malcolm at UK CVC meeting 9th July. Draft message for Thrive Newsletter reminding readers that although the regional lead for the GP Veteran Friendly accreditation schema has ceased the programme continues. <p>Strategy milestones:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> My EVAPC appointment extended for 6 months until 2nd November 2025. Local Authority and ICB re-organisations leading to loss of corporate memory and focus on veterans. <p>Risks / Issues / Escalations / Decisions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EVAPC seat on Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Board should VAPC be disbanded. <p>c. Hertfordshire - BG.</p> <p>County 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 engagement 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 in order to encourage Herts to do more than the absolute minimum illusion of AFC engagement – citing lack of dedicated resources. <p>Risks / Issues / Escalations / Decisions:</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. Caused by RFCA to their own ends and not respecting the remit of the Board. HCC chairs seems happy to allow it. Lack of engagement by most Armed Forces Champions. Not seen as important except where individuals have a reason to care personally. 	
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Herts District Council Armed Forces Champion Attendance at Herts AF Covenant Boards Mar 21-Mar 25												
	Attended	Absent	Broxbourne	Dacorum	Three Rivers	St Albans	North Herts	East Herts	Hertsmere	Watford	Welwyn	
5 Mar 25 (Hybrid)	Claire Parry	Paul Seeby (Virtual)	Ron Tindall	Sarah Nelmes (Virtual)	Dawn Gamble	Val Bryant	David Andrews	Alpha Bird-Collins	Amanda Grimston	Alan Chesterman		
9 Oct 24 (Hybrid)	Claire Parry	Paul Seeby	Ron Tindall	Sarah Nelmes	Dawn Gamble	Val Bryant	David Andrews	Alpha Bird-Collins (No appts)	Amanda Grimston	Alan Chesterman (No appts)		
14 Mar 24 (Hybrid)	Claire Parry	Paul Seeby	Ron Tindall	Jon Tankard	Ajanta Hilton	Alistair Willoughby	David Andrews	Alpha Collins	Amanda Grimston	Steve McNamara		
28 Sep 23 (Hybrid)	Claire Parry	Paul Seeby	Not recorded	Jon Tankard	Ajanta Hilton	Alistair Willoughby	David Andrews	Alpha Collins	Amanda Grimston	Steve McNamara		
9 Mar 23 (Hybrid)	Simon Spiller	Paul Seeby	Julie Banks	Jon Tankard	Jacqui Taylor	Not recorded	Andrew Huggins	Sarah Hodgson-Jones	Amanda Grimston	Steve McNamara		
6 Oct 23 (Teams)	Simon Spiller	Paul Seeby	Julie Banks	Jon Tankard	Jacqui Taylor	Judi Billing	Andrew Huggins	Sarah Hodgson-Jones	Not recorded	Steve McNamara		
10 Mar 22 (Teams)	Simon Spiller	Paul Seeby	Julie Banks	Jon Tankard	Jacqui Taylor	Judi Billing	Andrew Huggins	Sarah Hodgson-Jones	Gill Stanton	Glyn Hayes		
30 Sep 21 (Teams)	Simon Spiller	Paul Seeby	Julie Banks	Jon Tankard	Jacqui Taylor	Judi Billing	Andrew Huggins	Sarah Hodgson-Jones	Gill Stanton	Glyn Hayes		
10 Mar 21 (Teams)	John Lloyd	Paul Seeby	Julie Banks	Jon Tankard	Jacqui Taylor	Judi Billing	Andrew Huggins	Sarah Hodgson-Jones	Darren Walford	Glyn Hayes		

d. Cambridgeshire & Peterborough - BG.

County Update:

- 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.

Key activities for next period:

- Encouraging Cambs and Peterborough to undertake Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.
- Encourage training for all Armed Forces Champions.
- Next Cambs and Peterborough Partnership Bd – 20 Mar 25.

Risks / Issues / Escalations / Decisions:

- Single point of success/failure is Partnership Coordinator.
- Wholesale lack of leadership.
- Continues to operate as a networking meeting.

e. Bedfordshire – no report - vacancy.

f. Essex - PW.

County Update:

- Essex CMPB met on 18/06/25 – a very comprehensive and insightful agenda with excellent discussion.
- Healthwatch Essex's Veterans Working Group met on 24/06/25. On leave – couldn't attend.
- Both of the above items should reassure VAPC (Eastern Region) that veterans' needs are very much on the radar in Essex and cross sector support is in-place.
- Various VE 80 events occurred

Key activities for next period:

- Continue ongoing liaison with District AFC leads.

Strategy milestones:

- Ensure ECC continues to liaise with schools in an effective way.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 / Issues / Escalations / Decisions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECC lowers its commitment to CMPB. • Continuing resistance from housing officers to offer accommodation to service leavers. <p>Action – identified from several counties, mis-application of the local residency rules continues. All to identify District Council leads for MJ to write to point out issues faced by veterans and their families.</p>	All
4. Functional / Common Interest Groups (CIG) Updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Employment & Transition – no report. b. Finance – no report. c. Health & Wellbeing – CIG now on hold. d. Housing – CIG on hold. e. Veterans & The Law – no report. f. Welfare – some items covered in 3a above. 	
5. Personnel / Committee Management Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. All personnel management is on hold. 	
6. AOB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. There was no AOB. 	
7. DONM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Sep (Virtual) 1400-1500 • 27 Oct (Virtual) 1400-1500 • 8 Dec (F2F Cambridge TAC) 1030-1300 	