

MINUTES OF THE EASTERN VETERANS ADVISORY & PENSIONS COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD FACE TO FACE AT ARC CAMBRIDGE – MON 29 JUNE AT 1030

Present: Malcolm Johnston (MJ) Stewart Blackburn (SB) Kath Hutton (KH)	Tenure Full Full Co-opted	Role: Chair Chair UKCVC/Norfolk Joint Vice Chair/Suffolk/Welfare/Sec
Dial In: Ian Andrews (IA) Darren Hickie (DH) Philip Wilson (PW) Barrie Griffiths (BG)	Full Co-opted Full Full	Law Thrive Together East of England Essex Herts/Cambs
Apologies: Diane Palmer (DP) Barry Budgen (BB) Stephen Heard (SH)	Full Co-opted Full	Health Joint Vice Chair/Norfolk/Health
Not Present Andrew Catton (AC) Rob Catton (RC) Ben Conway (BC)	Co-opted Co-opted Co-opted	Suffolk/Law Law

Item	Discussion	Action
1. Welcome & Introduction from Chair	a. Apologies as listed above. b. MJ welcomed everyone despite the technical difficulties. He noted that SH has been re-appointed for 3 yrs. MJ is resigning from the committee wef the date of this meeting and BG has volunteered to be the Interim Chair. There were no dissentions.	
2. National/ Regional level issues	a. Future of VAPCs and update from UK CVC. - SB was quite positive, as measures to recruit and renew VAPC membership had been agreed. This was essential in the Eastern Region, as the committee was now below minimum numbers (12). Those who are co-opted should consider becoming full members – this will entitle them to travel expenses and the clearance level for open conversations. Names will be passed to VAPC Sponsor team and appointments will be processed without competition. - The new Min V&P, Calvin Bailey MBE MP, had spoken at the AF Covenant conference on 23 June. Vice Chair UKCVC had attended and had a useful conversation with him regarding the VAPCs providing independent feedback on the Valour process. Members were encouraged to view the conference briefings online. - SB has met with the new Head of Valour, Neil Thomas OBE, who seems passionate about helping veterans. He is keen to work with us and hopes that all new Field Officers will work with their VAPCs. The contact details of all Chairs have been passed on. - The Field Officer for the Eastern Region is due to be appointed soon. Members were requested to make	

	introductions to their networks to make them effective quicker. - Overall SB is more positive that the OVA has been forced to listen to the VAPCs and have the opportunity to show the wealth of knowledge that exists. b. Op Valour in Eastern Region update. - Generally, Op Valour were not very informed on the Thrive Together programme and it was hoped that there would have been an opportunity for TT to take a lead. 3 EOIs were submitted for the region; Northampton, North (Cambs & Peterborough, Bedford and Luton, Norfolk), South (Suffolk, Essex and Herts). - Meetings were held with most of the community bids submitted and a range of key organisational partners, but there have been several small local bids also submitted with no discussion. - There will be a challenge to provide cover across the region with such a dispersed network. - The lack of leadership from the OVA has been a problem and MJ applauded DH for his effort in getting people to talk to each other. Valour was supposed to connect services, but the competitive rollout has led to further isolation in some cases. - PW expressed concerns for Essex as it does not seem to have been discussed in any of his forums. Healthwatch have been taking a lead in Essex, but a change of personnel will see that diminish. - BG mentioned that the HfH Community Builders were working well, although their reach is small. They are keeping a low profile in Valour because they do not run actual hubs. d. Thrive Together Update. - The Professional Network has been rolled out and there is intent to expand it to the South East, South West, Wales and NI.	
3. County Updates	a. Suffolk (KH). County Update: - Aware of new HfH group in Coltishall. 17 May attended a celebration organised with a local care home for combined age of 302 of 2 WW2 Wrens and a Land Girl. Organised letters from Suffolk AF Commissioner. 20 May – held Veterans Coffee morning at JP – 85 in attendance. 26 May – Op Valour meeting ref EoE EOI. 10 Jun – Not Forgotten Assoc event in Lowestoft. 23 June – spoke at James Paget Safeguarding conference. 24 June – held Armed Forces Day Coffee Morning at JP – 56 in attendance, including other support organisations – WWTW, Royal Anglian Welfare Offr, Blind Veterans UK. 27 June – attended Armed Forces Day in Lowestoft.	

	Key activities for next period: • 1 Jul - Service Leavers Event EoE – Ipswich. • 2 Jul – DWP event for veterans – GY. • 16 Jul – Suffolk AFCPB. Risks / Issues / Escalations / Decisions: • Armed Forces Support post at James Paget end-dated wef 31 Aug. No plan yet as to how Armed Forces will continue to be supported in East Norfolk/Suffolk other than AF Champions on the staff.. b. Hertfordshire (BG). County Update: • Herts CB Action Plan. • Increased veteran-friendly GP practices (36 → 71). • All 6 Herts hospitals accredited as VA. • Two care homes accredited. • OP Community support line helped 55 referrals in six months. Closed 31 Mar 26. Now Herts Community Navigation Service. • LGR activity beyond District plans for Remembrance plans? • Use of case studies to bring relevance of the Board to the fore. • Stevenage BC – Op Valour. • Lack of Armed Forces Champion commitment. 4 of 10 attended last Board. Key activities for next period: • More meaningful and action focussed Board Action Plan • Ensure continuity and stability in Covenant Board structure ahead of the 2028 LGR. • Development of Herts elements of Op Valour. Risks / Issues / Escalations / Decisions: • ICB reorganisation and retirement of key AFC advocates. • LGR reorganisation and loss of Districts. Impact on AFC/Covenant Board. • Increasing focus on cadet activities despite cadets not being part of the AFC. SDR Report increasing cadets by 30% will not help with this miss-focus. • Lack of engagement by most Armed Forces Champions. c. Cambs & Peterborough (BG). County Update: • Priority is getting organisations, including Parish Councils, to sign up to Covenant. • Veteran Friendly Framework. Actively encouraging Cambs and Peterborough-based care homes to seek VFF accreditation. • Covenant Officer renamed Armed Forces Covenant Partnership Coordinator.	
--	--	--

	- Continues to be networking group, although enthusiastic but with single point of success/failure in the Covenant Officer. Key activities for next period: - Encouraging Cambs and Peterborough to undertake Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. - Next Cambs and Peterborough Partnership Bd – 24 Sep 26. - LGR and the role of the Armed Forces Covenant. Risks / Issues / Escalations / Decisions: - Single point of success/failure is Partnership Coordinator. - Continues to operate as a networking meeting. - Op Valour draining LA "Covenant Officer" capacity through the requirement to deliver data. d. Essex (PW). County Update: - Healthwatch Essex (HWE) continues to be the "point of the spear" when it comes to raising awareness of veterans' and Armed Forces Community affairs. - HWE Armed Forces Community Working Group met on 15/01, 19/03, 21/05. - HWE created a new PCN network which has met twice; 08/04 & 10/06. - Co-ordinated by Healthwatch, HWE networking group meetings have been well attended (avg 30 participants) insightful and productive with a vast array of speakers and other input. - Loss of key personnel from HWE w/c 22/06 to transfer to Cambridgeshire – very much Essex's loss. - Civilian Military Partnership Board has met only once on 09/01. - May elections have seen Reform take control of Essex County Council – effect on CMPB yet to be seen. - Help for Heroes Community Co-ord continues to do proactive veteran support work in northeast Essex. Review of outstanding actions: - None. Key activities for next period: - Continue ongoing liaison with county partners. - Support Datum Attitude's work in the county. - Attend and monitor AFCWG & AFCPCN meetings. Strategy milestones - 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.	
--	---	--

	- Support Healthwatch replacement personnel in their AFCWG work. Risks / Issues / Escalations / Decisions: - ECC lowers its commitment to CMPB. - Continuing resistance from housing officers to offer accommodation to service leavers. - Postponement of Combined Authority Mayors' elections to 2028 and subsequent knock-on impacts on Local Government Reform.	
4. Functional / Common Interest Groups (CIG) Updates	a. There were no reports.	
5. Personnel / Committee Management Issues	a. See Item 3(a). b. IA is not seeking to renew his tenure after 3 yrs.	
6. AOB	a. H4H People's Promise to Veterans Campaign - Speak up for a future where all veterans get the support they need after service. H4H Manifesto Launch. Houses of Parliament 23 Jun 26: https://www.helpforheroes.org.uk/take-action/campaigning-for-change/peoples-promise-to-veterans/ b. MoD Armed Forces Covenant Team seeking comment and feedback on the draft of the updated Covenant Legal Duty Statutory Guidance, by 3 Jul 26: https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/review-the-draft-statutory-guidance-and-share-your-feedback/ c. AFC Conference 23/24 Jun 26 recording: https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/conference/attend/ d. MJ has convinced English Heritage to sign the AF Covenant after 2 years of working on them. Signing will be at Audley End. e. MJ will also be assisting at RHC Founders Day. f. SB thanked members for their contributions and reinforced the need to look for new members and to support the Valour team effectively. g. SB recorded his thanks to MJ for several years of hard work and his contribution to the VAPC. h. MJ thanked KH for her Sec duties.	
7. DONM	Proposed 2026 dates: - Mon 7 Sep (Virtual) 1400-1500 - Mon 26 Oct (Virtual) 1400-1500 - Mon 7 Dec (F2F) 1030-1230 venue tbc	