

# **CENTRAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WAR PENSIONS**

## **MINUTES OF THE 145<sup>th</sup> MEETING**

**1400hrs WEDNESDAY 6 DECEMBER 2006  
HISTORIC ROOM 13, MOD MAIN BUILDING, WHITEHALL**

Details of those present at the meeting are attached at Annex B.

### **1. CHAIRMEN'S OPENING COMMENTS**

1.1 A copy of the Chairmen's opening comments are attached at Annex A.

### **2. MINUTES OF THE 144<sup>TH</sup> MEETING**

2.1 The minutes of the 144<sup>th</sup> meeting were agreed without comment.

### **3. MATTERS ARISING**

3.1 No matters arising.

### **4. VETERANS AGENCY REPORT**

4.1 Tim Taylor introduced the Veterans Agency Report, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting. He highlighted the importance of having challenging targets and stressed the Agency was continually working hard to achieve them all.

4.2 He gave members a brief update on the merger of the Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency (AFPAA) and the Veterans Agency (VA) and informed members that the name of the new agency as of April 2007 would be Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (SPVA). It was his responsibility to ensure that the levels of service currently provided by the VA would be maintained and improved upon in his new role as Director of Veterans Services. Trevor Spires would be the Chief Executive of SPVA.

4.3 Tim Taylor informed members that the name of the War Pensioners' Welfare Service was thought to be out of date and slightly misleading as the service is provided to more customers than War Pensioners. Consideration was being given to the name 'Veterans Welfare Service' (VWS) and members views were sought to the change of name. Gill Grigg agreed, however she expressed concern that the term Veterans Welfare Service did not mean that all veterans could use the service. Trevor Spires assured her that the VWS extension of services to customers other than War Pensioners would begin gradually so there would be no erosion of service to current customers.

## **5 WAR PENSIONS POLICY REPORT**

5.1 Peter Davies introduced the War Pensions Policy Report, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

5.2 The draft AFCS Evaluation report was discussed. Peter Davies stated that the uptake of the scheme had been lower than anticipated and steps would need to be taken to continue to raise awareness of the scheme to service personnel. He also said that a full review of the scheme would be undertaken after the scheme had been running for 5 years.

5.3 The issue of mental health tariffs and overseas treatment under the scheme were discussed and Sue Freeth and Toby Elliott both thought that these should be kept under review. These would continue to be monitored and covered fully in the 5 year review. It was also suggested that a continual analysis, on an annual basis be undertaken to identify the trends in misinterpretations of the scheme and the types of things being claimed for. Peter Davies agreed that this would be possible.

5.4 Peter Davies also advised that they would be examining the War Pension Scheme sometime in the future to try to make it easier to administer and taking into account DWP's Welfare Reforms which may impact on the scheme. It was important to ensure that WPS kept up with current welfare reform rationale. Any options for change would be put to Minister and the CAC would be consulted before any changes were made.

## **6. WAR PENSIONS COMMITTEE REPORT**

6.1 Jack Hargreaves introduced the War Pensions Committee Report which had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

6.2 Jack Hargreaves raised the matter of national advertising to raise awareness of the War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Schemes and benefits available to members of the serving forces and the ex-service community. He said that whilst more had been done recently, to coincide with 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary events in 2005 and the 2006 launch of Veterans Day he felt more could be done. Jonathan Iremonger stated that perhaps Local Authorities could do more to raise awareness and that they could get involved with local events and spreading the word about benefits available to veterans. Minister was content to listen to all suggestions for future events and these could be considered for events taking place in 2008.

6.3 Irene Shiels mentioned the use of Service Presentation Teams incorporating WPS/AFCS into their work, Trevor Spires confirmed that work was already underway to update the presentations as part of the merger.

## **7. LOCAL AUTHORITY DISREGARDS**

7.1 Irene Shiels explained that the many disparities between Local Authorities make the matter of disregards hard to discuss. A longstanding matter brought to the attention

of the committee was the administration of the disregard by the local authorities. In some cases the local authority was applying a 'notional' retirement pension rate even though the widow was not in receipt of a retirement pension and then applying a full disregard to the rest of the war widows pension.

7.2 The statutory disregard of the first £10 of any war pension is provided for by Department of Work and Pensions legislation; beyond this each local authority chooses whether or not to apply a full or partial disregard. Irene pointed out that if there was a full statutory disregard then there wouldn't be the disparity between councils. Jonathan Iremonger advised that there was now only one local authority not applying a total disregard, however Irene pointed out that whilst Local Authorities may state they are applying a full disregard, in fact they do not as they apply a notional retirement pension. Minister asked whether it would be possible to have any working examples.

***AP 01 - Irene Shiels to provide USofS with examples of Local Authorities applying total disregard.***

7.2 Irene Shiels asked if it would be possible for the Department to estimate the cost of applying a centrally funded total disregard. Ian Sprawson advised that the estimated cost would be £150m.

## **8. PROVISION OF WELFARE TO ROYAL IRISH REGIMENT**

8.1 Irene Shiels asked what the arrangements were being made for the continued Welfare Support for the injured, disabled and widowed members of the Home Battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment after the draw down next year.

8.2 Dr Braidwood informed members that this was still work in progress, but that a full report would be provided at the next meeting of the CAC.

***AP 02 - Dr Braidwood to provide a full report on the arrangements for welfare support to the Royal Irish Regiment at the next meeting.***

## **9. ANNUAL WAR PENSION UPDATING**

9.1 Sue Freeth had tabled a paper detailing costs associated with annual war pension updating and making a case for increasing them above the rate of the Retail Price Index (RPI). Minister thanked Sue for her paper but announced that the 2007/08 increase would be based on the RPI and he would be making an announcement in the House later.

## **10. IMPACT OF THE WELFARE REFORM BILL**

10.1 Sue Freeth introduced her paper and summarised the need for involvement in the work being done by DWP on Incapacity Benefit and getting people back into work. A pilot was being run in the Glasgow area and younger people on AFCS would be part of it.

10.2 Tim Usher pointed out that good work was done by the Lord Roberts workshops and The Poppy Factory Scotland to get disabled people into work. Toby Elliott also mentioned two schemes being run by the Queens Foundation. Peter Davies acknowledged that there was an array of good work being done and that it was essential that Policy kept a watching brief on developments.

## **11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING AND CLOSING REMARKS**

11.1 Irene Sheils asked if Minister could update the committee on Selly Oak hospital following the recent media coverage. Minister advised that he had visited the hospital and praised the work and care being provided. Feedback from soldiers receiving treatment and care was that it was working well and soldiers were being placed together wherever possible. Minister was impressed by the provision of accommodation for families, welfare workers and that soldiers were able to keep in contact with their regiments.

11.2 Minister advised that the date of the next meeting would be Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> June at 2pm.

## **MINISTER'S ADDRESS TO THE CENTRAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WAR PENSIONS**

**6<sup>th</sup> December 2006**

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. It is a privilege and a pleasure to accept the post of Minister for Veterans. I have been struck by the fantastic work done by ex-service organisations and I am looking forward to working with the Central Advisory Committee.

The Central Advisory Committee has a long history of providing Government with sound advice on war pensions issues and I look forward to working closely with you in the future. Although I have spent the past few months trying to get to grips with some of the main issues affecting veterans, I am sure that I have much to learn from your collective experience and knowledge on war pensions matters.

Turning now to the matter in hand, I have received one apology for today's meeting from Mr John Davies, Chairman of the Northern Ireland War Pensions Committee. I understand that Mr Davies is recovering from a serious illness and I am sure that you will wish to join me in sending him best wishes for a speedy recovery.

There have been no appointments or resignations since the last meeting.

I would now like to update you on a few items of interest.

As you know, DWP will continue to fund the Post Office card account until March 2010. In light of the decision on this subject at the last CAC meeting in June I wrote on your behalf to James Plaskitt MP Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for DWP, seeking his assurances that the Post Office card account should not be withdrawn until there is an acceptable alternative available.

In his reply he has accepted that there must be appropriate products in place for vulnerable customers when the Post Office card account ends in 2010 and Post Office limited is developing another savings product which will require a smaller balance and allow more frequent withdrawals.

This matter is clearly in its infancy and whilst I understand you have concerns, I propose to continue to work with DWP and Post Office Limited to develop their plans. I know that you have a keen interest in its progress and I have therefore asked Tim Taylor to ensure that the subject is included in his report to the Central Advisory Committee as a standing item. This will ensure that we do not lose sight of the matter and you can then raise any items of concern at the meeting.

In July 2006 my predecessor formally announced the merger of the Veterans Agency and the Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency. This decision followed a study

on the Veterans Agency and the Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency to find the best way of promoting service improvements, which concluded that a merger of the Agencies would improve the service we provide to Veterans and serving personnel by providing each group with a single point of contact for the whole range of services currently provided by the two agencies, and by putting in place more 'joined up' business processes.

I am determined that the quality of service provided to veterans will continue and further improve as part of the new Agency.

Turning now to compensation matters, the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme has been in force now for just over a year and a half. As is sensible with any new product we have conducted an evaluation of its performance in the first year and to identify any emerging issues. The evaluation is almost complete and a copy of the report was sent to you last week. I hope you all received your copy, if not, there are spare copies available. There will be an opportunity to discuss the report later in this meeting during the policy update so I will not go into great detail here. However I would like to thank those of you who were involved in the lead up to the new Scheme and who took part in the consultation either by completing the questionnaire or during face to face discussions or both. Even if we do not agree on certain points, your contributions are greatly valued and played a significant part in the evaluation process.

That concludes my opening remarks does anyone have any comments?

Now, we can turn to the first item on our agenda, the minutes of the meeting held in June.

## MEMBERS PRESENT AT THE MEETING

Sue Freeth	Director of Welfare, Royal British Legion
Ray Holland	Eastern WPC Chairman
Jack Hargreaves	London WPC Chairman
Cathy Walker	Deputy Controller (Branch Support, SSAFA Forces Help)
Irene Shiels	War Widows Association & East Midlands WPC
Toby Elliott	Chief Executive of the Ex-Service Mental Welfare Society
Jerome Church	General Secretary BLESMA
George Ross	Legion Affairs Officer, Royal British Legion Scotland
Jenny Green	Chairman War Widows Association
Gill Grigg	War Widows Association, Chairman of Defence Widows Working Party
Tim Usher	East Scotland WPC Chairman

## OBSERVERS

Sean Murphy	Republic of Ireland War Pensions Advisory Committee
Norman Butler	Isle of Man War Pensions Committee

## OFFICIALS PRESENT AT THE MEETING

Tim Taylor	Chief Executive, Veterans Agency
Rear Admiral Trevor Spires	Chief Executive, AFPAA
Dr Anne Braidwood	Director of Service Personnel Policy (Medical Advisor)
Peter Davies	Director of Service Personnel Policy - (Pensions)
Jonathan Iremonger	Director of Veterans Policy Unit
Ian Sprawson	Service Personnel Policy

## **CAC SECRETARIAT**

Sandra Lloyd      Veterans Agency

Jake Macfarlane      Veterans Agency