

**CENTRAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WAR PENSIONS**

**MINUTES OF THE 136<sup>TH</sup> MEETING**

**11.00 AM Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> June 2002, Metropole Building, Northumberland Avenue, London.**

Details of those present at the meeting and details of apologies received are listed at appendix B.

**1.0 CHAIRMAN'S OPENING COMMENTS**

- 1.1 Minister opened the event and welcomed all to the 136<sup>th</sup> CAC Meeting.
- 1.2 Minister extended a warm welcome to five new members, Gill Grigg, Debbie Bowles, Jerome Church, Toby Elliott and Gordon Dodds. Minister also welcomed Norman Butler from the Isle of Man attending for his first time as an observer.
- 1.3 There had also been several re-appointments, Tony Dixon, Willie Shackell, Jack Hargreaves, Tom House and David Hilton. Minister had said goodbye to David at the last meeting as he had served 10 years on the committee. However having considered all the applications for the appointments it was decided to re-appoint him for a further term. The Commissioner for Public Appointments agreed to this exception and Minister was very pleased to welcome David back onto the committee.
- 1.4 Sandy Sutherland resigned his membership of the CAC following the expiry of his term of office as Chairman of the Royal British Legion Scotland. Minister passed on his thanks for his valuable service over the past few years both to the CAC and war pensioners in general.
- 1.5 A review of the Polish Forces Scheme for reliable corroborative evidence had concluded and with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2002 consideration of claims under the Polish Scheme will be brought into line with those considered under the Service Pensions Order. Cases previously rejected on the basis of the more stringent evidential requirements will be reviewed on request but it may be difficult to identify each and every decision considered under the scheme. The Veterans Agency would be taking what action it could to identify any cases which may have been adversely affected. Minister asked CAC Members that if they or their organisations are made aware of any such cases then he would be grateful if they would bring them to the attention of the Veterans Agency.
- 1.6 With effect from April 2002 the eligibility rules for war widowers have been brought into line with those of war widows.

- 1.7 Minister explained that he had agreed to combine the rates payable for widows of privates and NCO's and standardise the pension at the higher rate currently appropriate for widows of NCO's. All other rates above this will remain based on the rank of the late husband. The Veterans Agency is working towards introduction of this change, which is planned to be in place from April 2003.
- 1.8 Since the last meeting of the CAC the issue of disregards had been taken up by the Veterans' Forum and the Veterans Task Force. At the last meeting of the Task Force the representative of the Local Government Association agreed to take the issue away for consideration.
- 1.9 From the beginning of August, War Pensioners in receipt of Unemployability Supplement will be able to have a work trial period returning to employment safe in the knowledge that if, within the first twelve months, they find this beyond their capabilities, the allowance can be re-instated.
- 1.10 From 1 October 2003, Unemployability Supplement will be paid in full for 13 weeks while recipients are in hospital, instead of 8 weeks as at present.
- 1.11 At the beginning of April 2002 the War Pensions Agency was renamed the Veterans Agency. The WPA already had a well-established and effective call centre providing advice and information on war pensions and other miscellaneous issues. It made sense to extend this service to become a free one-stop Helpline for all veterans' issues. The Veterans Agency had also launched a complementary web-site, initially providing information and links about current services offered to veterans.

## **2.0 MINUTES OF THE 134<sup>th</sup> MEETING**

- 2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting had been circulated. Members agreed them to be an accurate account of the meeting prior to them being signed by Minister.

## **3. MATTERS ARISING**

- 3.1 All action points being cleared Minister asked for any issues/matters arising not covered in his opening address.
- 3.2 Irene Shiels asked for her thanks to be recorded on the decision made on rank differentials in relation to widows.
- 3.3 Tom House handed out an updated table on Local Authorities that do not completely disregard war disablement and war widows/widowers pensions for information.

- 3.4 David Hilton informed Minister that SESCO had recently proposed to change its name to Veterans Scotland to fall into line with the name change of the War Pensions Agency to Veterans Agency.

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

- 4.1 Alan Burnham introduced the VA Report which had been circulated to members in advance of the meeting.
- 4.2 David Hilton and Tom House noted that there was a further improvement on clearance times from the PAT.
- 4.3 Irene Shiels expressed her concerns that the IT system used by the Agency is not supporting the Welfare Service. Alan Burnham assured Irene that this was an issue high on the agenda for the Veterans Agency. Alan went on to introduce Gerry Mulrooney who would be taking forward the Agency's IT strategy and looking at the long term replacement of the current system.
- 4.4 Alan then talked about the Agency's commitment to improve Communication and Marketing and informed the meeting that the Agency is working hard on producing a cohesive strategy on Marketing and Communication. He acknowledged the contribution made by Jack Hargreaves and the Marketing Action Group.
- 4.5 Jack Hargreaves stressed that it was very important to raise awareness of the Veterans Agency amongst the general public and not just the service and ex-service communities.
- 4.6 Alan Burnham provided background information on the role of the War Pensioners' Welfare Service following the creation of the Veterans Agency. He explained that the remit of WPWS remained support of war disablement pensioners and war widows but consideration was being given to a role which embraced the wider veterans community. Any changes will take place in the context of the wider rationalisation of welfare casework undertaken by ex-Service charities.

#### **5.0 PAYMENT MODERNISATION PROGRAMME**

- 5.1 Alan Burnham explained to the meeting that VA is playing an active role in the Payment Modernisation Programme (PMP) and preparations are progressing well. Currently some 56% of the Agency's customers are paid by ACT and thus the Agency has approximately 110,000 accounts to convert between April 2003 and December 2005.
- 5.2 DWP PMP will use a Corporate Call Centre to deal with conversion but VA has chosen not to use this facility and will undertake conversion in-house. VA customers will benefit from dealing with an Agency they know and staff who are sensitive to war pensioner needs. By utilising

the Welfare Service the Agency can visit those pensioners in their homes who need additional support, providing a more personal approach. If a customer does not have a bank account VA staff will advise them on what to do and the benefits of having their monies paid via ACT.

- 5.3 VA has enhanced the War Pensions Computer System (WPCS) to allow for weekly ACT payments from October 2002. New customers who wish to use ACT will now be offered the choice of weekly payments as well as monthly or quarterly.
- 5.4 From 7 October this year VA will be writing to customers to invite them to change their method of payment to ACT. The first payments of those customers who opt to convert to ACT will be made on 1 April 2003. The invitation letter is currently being developed.
- 5.5 If customers do not wish to or cannot open an account there will be other options available:
  - Universal Banking Services – the post office is making arrangements with major banks to enable customers to apply for and access bank accounts at post office counters;
  - Post Office Card Account – the post office will be able to provide a card account. We anticipate this service will be available from April, 2003; and
  - Exceptions Service – any exceptions including urgent payments will be covered by this new service.
- 5.6 Customers will be given assistance to help them choose the most suitable method of payment but will not be compelled to use ACT at this stage. From October this year, staff will be trained to provide advice and information to customers on the bank account options available for receiving their pension payment.
- 5.7 Senior officials from RBL and SSAFA are represented on the Special Interest Group (SIG) which enables them to liaise with the VA's customer base and gather practical suggestions for the development and delivery of key messages and products.
- 5.8 Commitment has been given not to take any active steps to encourage customers to change to ACT before April 2003 to allow the Post Office to develop and establish network banking.
- 5.9 William Harvey Kelly asked if the Republic of Ireland were covered in the Payment Modernisation Programme. Alan Burnham said he would take an action point to ensure that the needs of the Irish Republic are looked at.

***AP1 Alan Burnham to look at the needs of the Irish Republic within the Payment Modernisation Programme.***

- 5.10 Debbie Bowles said that may war pensioners and war widows use their orderbook as proof of ID or of being in receipt benefits and asked if the Project are considering any alternatives. Gerry Mulrooney said he would look into whether PMP Programme are considering this issue and if they have any plans to create an alternative proof of ID or receipt of benefit.

***AP2 Gerry Mulrooney to contact PMP Programme to ask them if they are considering an alternative methods of proof of ID or receipt of benefit on withdrawal of a claimants orderbook.***

## **6. CLOSING REMARKS**

- 6.1 FEPOW – Minister explained that the judicial review hearing on the nationality issue was scheduled to be heard in the High Court on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2002.
- 6.2 Taxation - Minister gave an update on the taxation issue relating to service pensions.
- 6.3 Toby Elliott asked what the present position was with the Joint Compensation Review as although he was selected to be part of working Group 8 looking at the compensation review, this group had not yet met. Liz McLoughlin agreed to review arrangements for Working Groups to ensure that best use was made of the ex-Service representative's input.
- 6.4 Toby Elliott told Minister that War Pension Committees are half way through their term and he feels that some people are a little disillusioned with the role of the committees since the introduction of appeal rights on Supplementary Allowances. He felt that the role of the committee should be looked at again to establish a more robust role.
- 6.5 Tony Dixon said he would volunteer to set up a small group similar to the one that looked at the CAC and seek a clearer way ahead. Tony will focus his review on the functions of the committees. He would report back to the CAC with his findings in December 2002.

***AP3 Tony Dixon to review the functions of the War Pension Committees.***

## **7. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

- 7.1 The next meeting will be held in London on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2002.

The meeting closed at 12.30

**ACTION POINT SUMMARY**

- AP1**            **Alan Burnham to look at the needs of the Irish Republic within the Payment Modernisation Programme.**
- AP2**            **AP2 Gerry Mulrooney to contact PMP Programme to ask them if they are considering an alternative methods of proof of ID or receipt of benefit on withdrawal of a claimants orderbook.**
- AP3**            **Tony Dixon to review the Functions of the War Pension Committees.**

## Appendix 2

### **CENTRAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WAR PENSIONS (CAC) ATTENDEES**

Dr Lewis Moonie	Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Tina Kent	Private Secretary
Liz McLoughlin	DGSPPoL
Mr Alan Burnham	WPA Acting CE
Mr Gerry Mulrooney	Head of IT and Communications
Dr A Braidwood	WP Medical Policy and Standards
Mr Sandy Adams	WPA Policy
Mr T C House	Head of Pensions, Royal British Legion
Air Comm J G Hargreaves	London WPC Chairperson
Brig A K Dixon	Vice-Chairman, Confederation of British Service and Ex-service Organisations
Mrs I Shiels	War Widows Association & East Midlands WPC
Mr D B Hilton	Pensions Officer, Royal British Legion Scotland
Mjr G Dodds	Regional Welfare Officer and Secretary of the Ex- Services Mental Welfare Society (Combat Stress).
Commodore T Elliot	Chief Executive of the Ex-Services Mental Welfare Society (Combat Stress)
Lt Col J Church	Chief Executive and General Secretary of BLESMA
Mrs G Grigg	War Widows Association, Chairman of Defence Widows Working Party
Mrs D Bowles	Public Relations Officer, War Widows Association Chairman RAF Widows Association

## **Observers**

Col CWD Harvey-Kelly      Republic of Ireland Advisory Committee

Brigadier N Butler      Isle of Man War Pension Committee

## **Apologies received**

Major Gen N Richards      COBSEO

Brigadier W Shackell      SSAFFA Forces Help

Mr David Wilson      FEPOW Association

## **CAC Secretariat**

Mrs Sandra Lloyd  
Mrs Samantha Bustin

## **Observers**

Clare Parsonage  
Pam Bradshaw