

CENTRAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WAR PENSIONS

MINUTES OF THE 135TH MEETING

11.00 AM Tuesday 30th October 2001, at Old War Building, Whitehall

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

1. CHAIRMANS OPENING COMMENTS

1.1 Minister opened the event and welcomed all to the 135th CAC Meeting and his first meeting in the chair.

1.2 Minister said that CAC has a long history of providing government with sound advice on war pensions and looked forward to working closely with the members of the CAC in the future.

1.3 Minister then outlined some developments relating to war pensions;

a) Transfer of WPA to the MoD

The move of WPA to the MoD was aimed at enabling the MoD to provide a fully comprehensive and integrated programme for veterans under his stewardship as Minister for Veterans' Affairs. Although it was early days there was already good evidence that the agency is best placed to co-ordinate its services more effectively since the move to the MoD. Minister also reaffirmed that he is committed to supporting the agency in its efforts to continually improve standards and service.

b) Changes in Pensions Legislation April 2001

Minister expressed his gratitude to all of those who contributed to the consultation exercise on the changes to legislation that came into force in April 2001.

WPA had hosted a training event in March to brief representatives of the ex-service organisations on the details of the changes and this event was very well received.

c) Unisys/Management Today Service Excellence Award for Public Service

Minister said that WPA winning the Unisys Award was a fine testament to the quality of service which the Agency provides to the very special people who rely on their efforts.

d) Chartermark

It had recently been confirmed that WPA's application to retain the Charter Mark status for another three years had been successful. Minister wished to congratulate the agency and record his thanks to WPA staff for their commitment and hard work.

- 1.4 Minister made mention of Ray Holland and David Hilton who were attending their last meeting as CAC members, as they have both completed 10 years on the CAC, the maximum period under the guidelines provided by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Minister said that Ray, as General Secretary of BLESMA, a War Pensions Committee Chairman and a member of the COBSEO Executive, has drawn on his very wide experience to provide wise counsel to a succession of Ministers. He went on to say that David, representing the Royal British Legion Scotland, has not only championed the interests of war pensioners north of the border but has brought to the committee an expert knowledge of war pensions.

Minister thanked both Ray and David on behalf of the committee and recorded his thanks for their service.

2. **MINUTES OF THE 134th 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**

Far Eastern Prisoners of War

- 3.1 David Wilson expressed his gratitude to WPA for the efficient way that they had dealt with the FEPOW ex-gratia payment exercise. Minister said that he had visited the Agency and was very impressed by the large amount of work undertaken by the agency in a short space of time whilst continuing to deliver core business.

Digital Hearing Aids

- 3.2 David Hilton said that Scottish hospitals now provide digital hearing aids to people who had a clinical need. He wanted to pass on his thanks to WPA for their involvement in supporting this issue. Minister said that this would be an ongoing issue as there will always be better and more expensive hearing aids available, but the task force on veterans' issues will keep this matter in view.

4. WAR PENSIONS AGENCY REPORT

- 4.1 Alan Burnham introduced the WPA Report to the CAC which had been circulated to members in advance of the meeting.

Far Eastern Prisoners of War

- 4.2 Irene Shiels raised an issue that arose with regard to a Far Eastern Prisoner of War, particularly a civilian internee that had been brought to her attention as he had been refused an ex-gratia payment because he does not come under the criteria as being 'British'. The advice given to him was to refer his request through his MP and the Ombudsman because the decision is a legal one and not one that WPA could make.
- 4.3 Alan Burnham reminded the meeting of the definition of British as "someone who was born in the UK or either of their parents or any of their grandparents were born in the UK". It was acknowledged by the meeting that the line had to be drawn and the extent of the term British was as generous as it could be.

Independent Complaints Panel

- 4.4 Irene Shiels thanked Alan for the WPA report and requested clarification with regards to the ICP, the report states that the ICP will consist of a WPC chair and 2 members from the Committee in the complainant's area. Irene wished to know if this was still correct.
- 4.5 Alan Burnham said that since the report was produced this issue had been raised at a recent WPC Chairman Conference and the Chairman had suggested that the ICP should consist of WPC Chairmen only. Alan Burnham agreed this request and subsequently the information in the WPA report had been superseded. Alan said that this would be reviewed if the number of cases requesting to go to the ICP increased.

5. REVIEW OF THE CAC

- 5.1 Tony Dixon submitted the CAC Sub-group recommendations, following their review of the CAC commissioned by the previous Minister prior to the event. He outlined his proposals to the committee and asked for agreement to take the recommendations forward. The committee endorsed the recommendations put forward by the sub-group. Officials will now set up an exercise to appoint additional members to the committee.

AP1 Officials to set up an exercise to appoint additional members.

6. PENSIONS (POLISH FORCES) SCHEME 1964. RELIABLE CORROBORATIVE EVIDENCE

- 6.1 Tom House expressed his concerns that the Polish Forces do not have the same reliable corroborative evidence as their British counterparts and requested that the Polish Scheme is reviewed to ensure that people who served in the Polish Forces are not disadvantaged when making a claim for a war pension.
- 6.2 Susan O'Malley confirmed that no individual had been disadvantaged by the differences regarding corroborative evidence in the Polish Scheme. Minister confirmed that the matter was under review and due consideration would be given to taking forward any necessary changes.

AP2 A Review of the Pensions (Polish Forces) scheme 1964 to be carried out with a view to equalising the criteria for supplying Reliable Corroborative Evidence.

7.0 WAR WIDOWERS

- 7.1 Tom House asked Minister if he would consider the issue of war widowers being treated the same as war widows and have the same rights. Currently a widower has to satisfy more stringent entitlement conditions than a war widow. Irene Shiels said that the war widows association also strongly endorses this request.
- 7.2 Tom House distributed copies of further legal opinion obtained by RBL's advisers regarding the conditions of entitlement for war widowers. Minister acknowledged the strength of the arguments put forward for applying the same eligibility criteria to widowers as currently applies to war widows and undertook to give the matter further consideration.

AP3 Minister to consider giving the same eligibility criteria to widowers as currently applies to war widows.

8.0 RANK DIFFERENTIALS

- 8.1 The law currently provides a standard pension rate for the widows of men who held the rank of private and equivalent, a slightly higher rate for the widow of all non commissioned officers, and then individual rates for eleven officer groupings with some variations for the First World War (WW1) widows. Irene Shiels said that the difference between a widow of a private and a widow of a corporal amounts to 35 pence per week. Irene said of all of the rank differentials this caused the most distress. Irene asked Minister if he would consider at least removing the 35 pence differential. Minister agreed to take a further look at the rank differentials applied to war widow's pensions.

AP4 Minister to look again at Rank Differentials on war widows pensions.

9.0 DISREGARDS

- 9.1 Irene Shiels explained that although most local authorities disregard war pensions and war widows pensions, there are still a few that don't and also as this issue is looked at annually the disregard can be removed at any time. Irene and Tom House both feel that disregard should be a statutory requirement for all Local Offices. Minister said that this was a matter for his colleague, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. Minister then undertook to raise it with the Veteran's Ministerial Task Force.

AP5 Minister to raise the issue of disregards with the Ministerial Task Force.

10. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

- 10.1 Members were advised that the next meeting would take place in June 2002. A specific date and time would be set in the near future.

The meeting closed at 11.55

ACTION POINT SUMMARY

- AP1** *Officials to set up an exercise to appoint additional members.*
- AP2** *A Review of the Pensions (Polish Forces) scheme 1964 to be carried out with a view to equalising the criteria for supplying Reliable Corroborative Evidence.*
- AP3** *Minister to consider giving the same eligibility criteria to widowers as currently applies to war widows.*
- AP4** *Minister to look again at abolishing Rank Differentials on war widows claims.*
- AP5** *Minister to raise the issue of disregards with the Ministerial Task Force.*

Appendix 2

CENTRAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WAR PENSIONS (CAC) ATTENDEES

Dr Lewis Moonie	Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Lt Cdr. Tony Radakin	Military Assistant
Mr Barry Miller	DGSPPoL
Mr Alan Burnham	WPA Acting CE
Dr A Braidwood	WP Medical Policy Manager
Mrs Susan O'Malley	WPA Policy
Mr Sandy Adams	WPA Policy
Brig A K Dixon OBE	Vice-Chairman, Confederation of British Service and Ex-service Organisations
Air Com J G Hargreaves CBE	London WPC Chairman
Mr D B Hilton	Pensions Officer, Earl Haig Fund Scotland
Lt Col R R Holland OBE BEM	Eastern England WPC Chairman
Mr T C House	Head of Pensions, Royal British Legion
Major Gen Nigel Richards CB OBE	Chairman, Confederation of British Service and Ex-service Organisations
Brigadier W E Shackell CBE	Deputy Controller, SSAFA Forces Help
Mrs I Shiels OBE	War Widows Association & East Midlands WPC
Mr A Sutherland	Chairman, Royal British Legion Scotland
Mr D Wilson	Hon Secretary Far East Prisoners of War Association
Mrs S Price	WPA Regional Welfare Manager

Also attending as Official Observer:

Colonel C W D Harvey-Kelly

Chairman, Republic of Ireland WPAC

Mrs Fiona Johnson

PA to WPA CE

CAC Secretariat

Mrs Sandra Lloyd

Mrs Samantha Bustin