

CENTRAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WAR PENSIONS

MINUTES OF THE 140TH MEETING

11.00 a.m. Tuesday 29th June 2004
DEFENCE COUNCIL SUITE, OLD WAR OFFICE BUILDING

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

1.0 CHAIRMAN'S OPENING COMMENTS

- 1.1 Minister opened the meeting by paying tribute to the contribution to veterans' welfare in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic by Major Gordon Dodds MBE, a member of the CAC, who had died since the last meeting. He referred to Gordon's excellent work as a Welfare Officer for Combat Stress and as Chairman of the Northern Ireland War Pensions Committee. Minister advised the meeting that he felt it was important for the Committee to have representation from Northern Ireland and that officials would be initiating an appointment exercise to identify a suitable candidate in time for the next meeting.
- 1.2 Minister welcomed Sean Murphy to his first meeting as an observer representing the Ireland War Pensions Advisory Committee.
- 1.3 Minister updated the meeting on the plans for a Veterans Awareness week to take place from 3rd to 10th July 2005 and acknowledged the part played by Jack Hargreaves and the London War Pensions Committee in first putting forward the idea. Since the last meeting National Lottery funding had been secured for the Veterans Reunited programme, many veterans having taken advantage of the Heroes Return scheme to attend the recent D-Day Commemoration events in Normandy. Minister paid tribute to the way in which the Veterans Agency had successfully handled the extra work arising from their role as the first contact point for heroes return applicants.
- 1.4 Since the last meeting approval had been received from H.M. Treasury to extend the payment of funeral expenses to qualifying war pensioners living abroad.

2. MINUTES OF THE 139TH MEETING

- 2.1 The minutes were agreed and signed.

3. MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Travelling expenses to attend medical examinations

Alan Burnham advised that contract negotiations with the provider for services after April 2005 were on going and that these were expected to provide for an increase in the rate of mileage allowance paid.

3.2 Local authority disregard of war widows pensions

Since the last meeting Alan Burnham had written to East Staffordshire Borough Council seeking clarification of their position on the disregard of war widows pension for council tax and housing benefit. They had replied confirming their continuing policy to deduct a notional amount in respect of retirement pension where there was underlying entitlement. Irene Shiels felt that this meant that they were not in fact implementing a true total disregard policy and asked Minister if he would take the matter further. She also suggested that there might be other local authorities who similarly claimed to operate a full disregard but operated on the same lines as east Staffordshire. Minister agreed to take the matter away and would initially consider approaching the relevant Member of Parliament for the area.

4. VETERANS AGENCY REPORT

- 4.1 Alan Burnham introduced the Veterans Agency Report which had been circulated in advance of the meeting.
- 4.2 Tom House highlighted the Veterans Agency's valuable presence at the RBL National Conference providing advice and information on war pensions and veterans' issues.
- 4.3 Jack Hargreaves raised the Veterans Agency's approach to raising awareness of war pensions and veterans' services amongst those veterans who were not involved with the ex-Service organisations. He felt that despite having raised the issues over a period of several years the response had been disappointing and there was still a lack of an effective centrally driven strategy.
- 4.4 Gill Grigg referred to the postponement of the Communications Symposium which had been due to be held on 1st July. She said that it was disappointing that the event had not gone ahead and wondered if the approach to getting the right attendees had been ineffective.
- 4.5 Alan Burnham agreed that the postponement of the Symposium had been a disappointment but there had been very little success in gaining the attendance of appropriate national organisations as envisaged when the event was planned. He felt it was better to postpone the event and re-consider the approach to attracting key organisations. He also acknowledged that whilst some excellent work was carried out by Veterans Agency staff in promoting awareness of war pensions and related matters there was certainly scope for improvement and that this was currently a high priority.

5. WAR PENSIONS POLICY REPORT

- 5.1 Jonathan Iremonger introduced the War Pensions Policy Report which had been circulated in advance of the meeting. He updated briefly the current state of the pensions and compensation reviews where the primary enabling legislation was now under consideration by the Grand Committee of the House of Lords. The first session had taken place on 28 June and a second session was scheduled for 5 July. The opposition had put down a substantial number of amendments, covering

the range of areas in which it was known that ex-Service groups had outstanding concerns. The crucial Third Reading and Report stages were expected in mid September or October.

- 5.2 The Government is introducing legislation to allow same-sex partners to enter into legally recognised Civil Partnerships that would carry the same rights, entitlements and responsibilities as a marriage. The War Pension Scheme would be amended to apply this legislation to the scheme with effect from **the date** the legislation comes into law (October 2005). This was in line with the Government's wider social agenda designed to recognise where appropriate the range of relationships in the UK.
- 5.3 Norman Butler raised the issue of how the Department would deal with claims under the new scheme when there had already been an award under the old arrangements, perhaps in a related area (e.g. a second amputation of a leg or arm). Jonathan Iremonger said that this would not be an issue with respect to lump sum pain and suffering awards which were not provided under current arrangements and which would be paid according to the rules of the new scheme. For cases where loss of earnings capacity might be a consideration, transitional arrangements would be put in place that would take account of previous Service-attributable disablements and any previous income stream awards."

6. WAR PENSIONERS WELFARE SERVICE POST 2005

- 6.1 Gill Grigg introduced her paper which had been circulated in advance. She was concerned that staff in WPWS should have a clear picture of their role in relation to those people who received compensation under new Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS) after April 2005. She believed that it was eminently sensible to build on the experience of the WPWS and enlarge the remit to cover beneficiaries of the new scheme.
- 6.2 Jonathan Iremonger agreed that it was important that appropriate welfare support should be in place for the new scheme and that in principle WPWS was well-placed to provide this. It might not, however, be exactly the same service as provided to current war pensioners as the new scheme had a different emphasis.
- 6.3 Minister concluded the discussion by advising that he would be asking Jonathan Iremonger and Alan Burnham to work together to provide him with proposals for welfare support for the AFCS in advance of the next CAC meeting.

7. AFCS – IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CAC

- 7.1 Toby Elliott put forward the view that it was vital that Minister continued to make use of the expertise amongst CAC members for consultation on issues arising from the new AFCS and asked Minister if this was his intention.
- 7.2 Minister advised that he had yet to address the question of the CAC's role in relation to the new AFCS. He undertook to give the matter consideration and bring forward proposals as an agenda item for the committee's next meeting.

8. APPOINTMENTS TO THE CAC

- 8.1 Alan Burnham advised the meeting that a number of members' term of appointment would expire on 31 December 2004. As each of them had already been re-appointed for a second term any further extension would have to be via open competition. The vacancies would be advertised through the usual channels and those members whose terms were ending were welcome to re-apply.

9. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

- 9.1 Minister advised that the next meeting will take place on Wednesday 8th December in MOD Main Building.