

Meridio 05.10.10.02.02

July 2007

See Distribution

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE VETERANS FORUM
HELD IN HISTORIC ROOM 13, MOD MAIN BUILDING
FRIDAY 15 JUNE 2007 AT 0930 HOURS

Present	Derek Twigg	Minister for Veterans	Chairman
	COBSEO Executive Committee		
	AVM Tony Stables	Chairman COBSEO	
	Robert Leader	Vice Chairman COBSEO/ CE	
	Air Mshl Sir Robert Wright	St Dunstan's	
	Maj Gen John Moore-Bick	RAF Benevolent Fund	
	Maj Gen Sir Evelyn Webb-Carter	Forces Pension Society	
	Maj Gen John Sutherell	Army Benevolent Fund	
	Maj Gen Andrew Cumming	Officers Association	
	Cdre Toby Elliott	SSAFA Forces Help	
	Air Cdre Ed Jarron	Combat Stress	
	Lt Col Jerome Church	RAFA	
	Cathy Walker	BLESMA	
	Sue Freeth	SSAFA Forces Help	
	Jenny Green	TRBL	
	Gary Gray	War Widows Association	
	Air Cdre Jack Hargreaves	Veterans Scotland	
	Carol Edge	War Pensions Committee	
		Secretary COBSEO	
	Other Government Departments		
	Karen Todd	DH	
	Jason Wright	HMT	
	Graham Verrall	Home Office	
	Steve Daly	DWP	
	Neil Langhorn	Scottish Executive	
	David Watt	Scotland Office, DCA	
	Ministry of Defence		
	RAdm Peter Wilkinson	DS Sec	
	RAdm Trevor Spires	CE SPVA	
	Jonathan Iremonger	D VPU	
	Tim Taylor	Director Veterans Services	
		SPVA	

Dr Anne Braidwood Air Cdre Philip Miles Air Cdre Paul Evans Peter Davies Tracey Vennai Cdr Graham Jardine Lt Col Birkhead Gp Capt Clive Montellier	D SP Pol (Medical Adviser) D Resettlement D Healthcare D SP Pol Pensions DS Sec VPU SDD DS Sec AD VPU PS4(A) COS Pers	
Liz Moore Phil Hoare	VPU Sec 2 VPU Sec Support 1b	}Secretariat }

Apologies	Air Marshal David Pocock Air Cdre Paul Hughesdon Ian Keith Christine Paxton Cdre Barry Bryant Ron Smith Annette Banas Dave Skillen Siobhan Larkin Jonquil Dartnall Kenneth Robbie Angela Ruggles Geoff Marlow Caroline Green	DCDS (Pers) ACOS Pers Pol DS Sec-Head Hons & Cer DS Sec VPU LHI DD Seafarers UK Veterans Scotland FCO DWP DCLG Welsh Office, DCA Scotland Office, DCA DfES Welsh Assembly Government LGA	
------------------	---	--	--

Item (a)	Discussion and Decisions (b)	Action (c)
1 Introduction	1. DS Sec advised that the Minister for Veterans had been unexpectedly called to the House and that he would chair the meeting until Minister's arrival. He welcomed everyone to the meeting; particularly those attending for the first time, and invited all attendees to introduce themselves.	
2 Minutes and Actions arising from Last Meeting	1. The minutes were accepted as a true record of the previous meeting. DS Sec invited D VPU to review the actions arising from the last meeting. 2. <u>Para 3b2 – Veterans Workstream Update – Recognition.</u> It was noted that the final event of the commemorations for the 25th Anniversary of the Falkland Islands would take place on 17 June.	

	<p>Action Overtaken By Events</p> <p>3. Combat Stress advised that The Big Lottery Fund had agreed to provide a grant of £400k for the pilgrimage to the Falkland Islands in November 2007. the pilgrimage was being jointly organised by Combat Stress and SAMA 82.</p> <p>4. <u>Para 3b5 – Veterans Workstream Update – Recognition.</u> Director Veterans Services SPVA advised that the new Veterans-UK website contained references to dependants. Action complete.</p> <p>5. <u>Para 3b6 – Veterans Workstream Update – Recognition.</u> SDD VPU advised that national television companies had not been interested in a trailer of the ‘Can You Recognise a Veteran’ DVD and therefore no further action had been taken.</p> <p>6. <u>Para 3c2 - Veterans Workstream Update – Support.</u> A draft protocol on a study on Rehabilitation had been received and forwarded to the Medical Research Council (MRC) for consideration. A technical appraisal of the protocol by MRC was awaited. It was hoped that a response from the MRC would be received in two to three months. Action complete.</p> <p>7. Minister arrived, apologised for his absence at the start of the meeting and assumed the Chair of the meeting.</p>	
<p>3 Veterans Workstream Updates a. Transition</p>	<p>a1. Minister noted that continued good service was being reported in the provision of resettlement advice; with the initial results from the special resettlement support programme for the Royal Irish (Home Service) personnel showing some very good results. Progress was being made in the provision of welfare support and the development of the provision for Early Service Leavers. The arrangements for the passing of Service Leavers (SL) contact details to ex-Service organisations had been implemented.</p> <p>a2. D Resettlement confirmed that there had been good results from the Royal Irish (Home Service) personnel programme, which was targeted at the 3000 personnel who began a phased discharge programme in Sep 06 on disbandment of their battalions. Some 90% of those who left in the early tranches to the end of Mar 07 were reported as having found employment by the termination of their</p>	

military service date.

a3. The quality of support for Service Leavers (SL) who were medically discharged continued to improve. Implementation of the revised Army Sickness Absence Management Plan (ASAMP) had been completed and all personnel transferred to the new arrangements. As a result, better contact would be maintained and there would be greater visibility of those on sick leave. The loophole which meant that medical dischargees from the Army initial training establishments did not receive the opportunity to access Career Transition Partnership (CTP) resettlement support had been closed.

a4. Progress in reducing the backlog in passing medical discharge documents of Army personnel to the SPVA had reduced delays in assessing the entitlement to, and making awards of, War Pension and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme payments. This would reduce the risk of short-term hardship and permit longer term financial planning.

a5. An agreed tri-Service standard for disabilities information that could be passed to resettlement providers had been established. This would enable accurate advice on future career and vocational training choices to be provided. The document was being staffed with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) in order to seek pan-Departmental acceptance of the content. Once agreed the standard would be introduced in MOD and be a recognised vehicle for access to DWP disability support and benefits. Agreement in principle had also been reached to allow an earlier indication of likely compensation payments and occupational pensions, where appropriate, to be provided to personnel due to be medically discharged. This had been identified as a key factor in delaying arrangements for post-discharge care plans by non-MOD organisations to which care is to be transferred.

a6. The definition of Early Service Leaver (ESL) had been extended to all those Service leavers not entitled to access CTP services. As a result all personnel who had served less than four years would receive a mandatory structured resettlement briefing. The provisional analysis from the DPA compliant survey of the employment status of ESLs had been completed. Although the final month's data was not

<p>b. Recognition</p>	<p>available about 63% of ESL in the survey sample were in work within 3 months of discharge rising to 68% within 6 months. D Resettlement considered this a good result as some of the individuals had a very low level of skills.</p> <p>a7. Work continues to exploit the potential of TRBL Civvy Street electronic portal as a further aid to ESL who had no access to CTP services. A number of presentations by TRBL's Civvy Street Project Team were being made to the specialist resettlement advisors preparatory to a final decision on initiating a programme to offer ESL mentored access to the system.</p> <p>a8. Interim arrangements for the passing of Service Leavers (SLs) contact details to "gatekeeper" charities where individuals gave informed consent had been implemented. SPVA will be meeting with the gatekeeper charities to establish the arrangements for the next phase of the programme.</p> <p>a9. The Scottish Executive asked if the information on SLs residing in Scotland and Wales could be provided to the Devolved Administrations. D Resettlement agreed to find out if it could be provided. TRBL considered that the second phase of the programme would be more effective in developing contacts with SLs.</p> <p>a10. DS Sec advised that a NAO report on D Resettlement was due later in the year and would provide an independent assessment of the service provided.</p> <p>b1. Minister advised that on 14 June he had attended the events at Pangbourne College and Greenwich to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Falklands Conflict. The main event would take place on Horse Guards Parade on 17 June.</p> <p>b2. DS Sec advised that the event on Horse Guards Parade would be an appropriate finale to the commemorations. The stands at Horse Guards Parade would be full and over 3,000 veterans would be marching. Members of the Royal Family would be attending with a flypast of Naval and RAF aircraft and helicopters. Weather permitting, there would be television link-ups to the Falkland Islands. The intention had been that the events would strike the</p>	<p>D Resettlement</p>
---------------------------	--	---------------------------

right balance between commemorations and celebrations, and that had been achieved.

b3. The Minister noted that Veterans Day on 27 June would celebrate the veterans of today. The national event was being held in Birmingham, many regional events were being planned and increased funding had been made available. The London event would be held in Greenwich. Eligibility for the HM Armed Forces Veterans Badge and Merchant Seafarers Badge had been extended to the end of 1984 to include the Falkland veterans. A badge presentation to Falkland veterans and widows would be held straight after the Forum.

b4. SDD VPU confirmed that lots of events would be taking place and it was necessary to ensure that the key messages were conveyed to visitors. Interest in the event was poor in London and Scotland and therefore Minister had met the Chair of the London Councils who agreed to encourage the Local Authorities in London to plan Veterans Day events in 2008. It had also proved difficult to engage with schools and it was necessary to find other ways to encourage the participation of schools in Veterans Day. Veterans Day 2008 would be launched in the autumn and veterans organisations and Local Authorities would be encouraged to attend the launch.

b5. SDD VPU stated that the HM Armed Forces Veterans Badge remained popular with the 500,000th badge likely to be presented in September 07, for which there would be a small press event.

b6. Chairman COBSEO noted that a very good Veterans Day event would be held in Nottingham. SDD VPU agreed that the bid from Nottingham had been of a high standard and had nearly been successful in winning the national event.

b7. Minister said that successful events in 2007 would encourage even more bids to hold events in 2008. This would ensure that Veterans Day was recognised as a national event. In response to a question, SDD VPU advised that Veterans Day was starting to appear in diaries. Veterans Day events did not have to be held on 27 June; this year events were being held between June and October.

<p>c. Support (including mental health and reservists)</p>	<p>c1. D SP Pol Medical Adviser stated that the Support Workstream had a continuing interest in the care of older veterans as well as those at risk of social exclusion. The delivery of public services reflected the differences in local populations which resulted in a variable response to issues.</p> <p>c2. The Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) had been a major focus of the Support Workstream as the major case-working charities (including TRBL and SSAFA-FH) had concerns about the assessment and funding of DFGs. DFGs were to help meet the cost of adapting a property for a disabled person and were administered by the local housing authority; the grants were means-tested. The Government had asked Bristol University to undertake a review of the DFG scheme and its review and recommendations were published in 2004. In January 2007 the Government set out its response and plans for the future. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), who had the Government lead on this issue, briefed members of Workstream 2 on 15 March.</p> <p>c3. Following the 2003 Medical Research Council (MRC) review of research into Gulf illness, MOD had been working with the MRC to identify a suitable way of addressing the rehabilitation needs of Gulf Veterans suffering from multi-symptom illnesses. Working with Cardiff University, it was hoped to develop an intervention which would help support veterans of the 1990/91 Gulf Conflict who had so far been unsuccessful in their efforts to return to life and living. A draft protocol had been received and submitted to the MRC. Technical appraisal of the protocol by the MRC was awaited.</p> <p>c4. The planned light touch mentoring pilot based at Catterick got underway on 18 June and would offer mentoring to ESLs deemed especially at risk of difficulty transitioning to civilian life. The plan was to recruit up to 100 personnel to receive mentoring along with 200 who would not be mentored so that the added value of the mentoring could be assessed. The study would continue for 6 months and be followed by an evaluation.</p>	
<p>4 Priority Treatment for War</p>	<p>1. Minister stated that priority treatment for those with any disablement accepted as caused or aggravated by service under the WPS or AFCS was</p>	

<p>Pensioners</p>	<p>an issue that was raised regularly. D SP Pol Medical Advisor had produced a paper, which had been circulated to all Forum members. A meeting had been held with the Minister of State at the Department of Health (DH); DH had been very supportive and would ensure that the provision was made widely known throughout DH.</p> <p>2. D SP Pol Medical Advisor agreed that there was a lot of interest in the issue and stated that Workstream 2 was the vehicle for feedback to MOD. The paper provided the historical basis for the arrangement and to set out the different focus in the NHS in 1953 and now. MOD was actively engaged with the Devolved Administrations and DH in how to advertise the priority treatment scheme. Although colleagues in DH delivered the service, the MOD needed to ensure that veterans and war pensioners understood what they could expect from the arrangement. D SP Pol MA asked for ideas from all as to how to publicise the arrangement.</p> <p>3. COBSEO advised that the subject would be discussed at the next COBSEO Executive Committee meeting and the outcome made known to MOD. The ex-Service organisations were also invited to write directly to MOD.</p> <p>4. The War Widows Association advised that it was necessary to understand where there was pressure on DH resources. TRBL considered that there was an issue about whether those war pensioners in receipt of a war pension as a result of being injured in combat should have priority over those in receipt of a war pension as a result of a non combat injury.</p> <p>5. BLESMA advised that they wrote regularly to the Chief Executives of the NHS Trusts reminding them of the provision and asked whether the DH Circular HSG (97)31 should be updated and re-issued.</p> <p>6. The Scottish Executive advised that this was an active issue as health was a devolved issue. It was necessary to ensure a consistent approach and delivery. The advice was issued every year and disseminated via IT systems.</p> <p>7. D VPU noted that a working group might be established to take the issue forward once COBSEO and the ex-Service organisations had commented.</p>	<p>COBSEO/ ex-Service organisations</p>
-------------------	---	---

<p>5 Health Issues i. Selly Oak/DMRC</p>	<p>i1. Minister invited D Healthcare to update the meeting.</p> <p>i2. D Healthcare advised that the military managed ward at Selly Oak was operational; 26 military nurses had been appointed which would rise to 39, psychiatric nurses and welfare officers were in place to provide support to injured Service personnel. Further modifications were being made to the facility to provide greater definition of the military area. The accommodation for the families had been provided by SSAFA FH and thanks were extended to SSAFA FH.</p> <p>i3. It was noted that users of the facility had been surveyed and had recorded a high level of satisfaction; the Shadow Defence Minister had visited recently and had received good reports.</p> <p>i4. D Healthcare noted that the new PFI hospital would allow the military ward to be developed and provide the opportunity to improve what was available. It was necessary to think now about what was required for the future. All personnel involved in the facility – NHS and MOD were to be congratulated.</p> <p>i5. The meeting noted that the feedback received from patients was very good but that the public had many misconceptions due to the unfavourable media coverage. There were concerns that MOD was not doing enough to publicise the success of Selly Oak.</p> <p>i6. The Forum was advised that it was necessary that a system was in place to ensure that the care package continued when personnel left the hospital and Armed Forces. This issue had been raised at the Tri-Service Welfare Conference held on 16 April. There was also an issue about how long ongoing care could be provided by MOD (it was currently from 3 months up to 2 years). The Defence Medical Discharge Policy Committee needed to consider whether this remained appropriate.</p> <p>i7. Director Veterans Services SPVA advised that follow-up monitoring could be provided for longer than 2 years, it was dependent on the individual case. It was considered that this information needed to be communicated widely within MOD and the ex-Service organisations by the SPVA to ensure that there was a consistent approach. A report back was to be made to Minister.</p>	<p>Director Veterans Services SPVA</p>
--	---	--

<p>ii. Community Based Mental Health Service Pilots</p>	<p>i8. Minister noted that the new wing at DMRC Headley Court had opened on time and stated that he held the service provided in very high regard. The House of Commons Defence Committee had visited on 14 June and had been impressed by the facilities.</p> <p>i9. BLESMA advised that they were closely involved in the work at Headley Court. The Chairman of COBSEO stated that he was also Chairman of Trustees at Headley Court and that the facilities at Headley Court had been extensively upgraded. Minister asked for a note of the work that the Trustees were undertaking at Headley Court.</p> <p>ii1. D SP Pol Medical Advisor stated that it was necessary to ensure the link between in-service and NHS facilities. Civilian health practitioners needed to understand the issues that resulted in Armed Forces personnel suffering mental health problems. DH was the owner of the initiative as the NHS was the principal route for healthcare for veterans. Work on identifying the pilot sites for the community-based mental health service for veterans was well advanced. Firm proposals had been received from Camden and Islington; this is important as they had the lead in providing services for those affected by the London bombings on 7 July 2005. It was hoped that the service would begin during the Summer.</p> <p>ii2. Discussions had taken place with the Stafford Mental Health Foundation Trust in the West Midlands which would provide a facility close to military bases and a large ex-Service community. A meeting had also been held with the Cornwall PCT in St Austell which would cover the RN/RM bases in the West of England. Another was planned with the North East Strategic Health Authority in Newcastle, which already had a large veterans population. Plans for a facility in Belfast were advanced and it is hoped to run the programme in Scotland and Wales.</p> <p>ii3. TRBL wished to ensure that alcohol addiction was also being considered. Many initiatives excluded people with alcohol dependency problems. D SP Pol Medical Advisor advised that alcohol was being considered and stated that the MOD hoped to be in a position to make a statement about the pilots shortly.</p> <p>ii4. D SP Pol Medical Advisor was asked about the service in NI and stated that the contract was being negotiated with the intention of the service being</p>	<p>Chairman COBSEO (as Chairman of Trustees DMRC Headley Court)</p>
---	--	---

<p>iii. MAP</p> <p>iv. Reservists Mental Health Programme</p>	<p>negotiated with the intention of the service being available in July. The work was being undertaken in conjunction with the NI Police Authority. Combat Stress agreed that this was the best model available.</p> <p>iii1. It was noted that an extension of the MAP (Medical Assessment Programme) to include veterans who have deployed on operations since 1982 had been announced on 11 June. Dr Ian Palmer, a Consultant Psychiatrist who was currently employed part-time in the MAP, would be employed fulltime and, in view of his experience both as a Medical Officer in the Armed Forces and then in the NHS, was considered to have the appropriate experience for the MAP. Veterans could be referred to the MAP by their GP and the MAP would also be available as a source of advice for GPs about the treatment and care of their patients who were veterans.</p> <p>iv1. D Healthcare updated the Forum on the Reservists Mental Health Programme at Chilwell.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. A total of 145 calls had been received since 22 November 2006. Of these 49 had been self-referrals, 6 GP referrals, 50 third party referrals, plus 40 invalid calls. b. 30 appointments had been booked. c. 22 assessments have taken place, 15 had been sent on for treatment with 7 referred back to their GP. 2 appointments had been cancelled. <p>The programme would be reviewed to assess how it was working.</p> <p>iv2. Combat Stress advised that it knew of one individual who had refused to visit Chilwell because of concerns about its military ethos. Minister asked Combat Stress to provide the details to allow the circumstances to be investigated. D VPU stated that the MAP was a possible alternative for those veterans unhappy with visiting Chilwell.</p> <p>iv3. TRBL acknowledged that the extension of the MAP was welcome but noted that it was not always viewed as independent. TRBL would also like to see the extension of the Chilwell programme to other mentally ill veterans.</p>	<p>Combat Stress</p>
---	--	----------------------

	<p>iv4. Minister stated that the NHS had the lead for the provision of healthcare for veterans; the MOD programmes were seeking to enhance the existing provisions and provide advice and support to GPs. If TRBL knew of individuals that are not able to access mental health services then the details should be provided to MOD to investigate.</p> <p>iv5. Combat Stress said that there have been great improvements for two groups – those with legacy issues and Service personnel on operations.</p> <p>iv6. COBSEO were concerned that not all veterans were aware of the various programmes available. COBSEO considered that the programmes should be better publicised and communicated to veterans and asked whether the SPVA could assist through its lines to war pensioners and Armed Forces pensioners. D Healthcare noted that if personnel were discharged with psychological injury they would already have been signposted to the options open to them.</p> <p>iv7. The War Widows Association said that it was also necessary to consider the widows and dependents who were traumatised by deaths in-Service. The War Widows Association were working with Combat Stress and VPU on a proposal seeking funding from the Veterans Challenge Fund to look at the issues for dependants.</p> <p>iv8. The Forum acknowledged that there has been significant progress on the care provided to veterans.</p>	TRBL
<p>6 SPVA Update & Communications</p>	<p>1. Director Veterans Services SPVA reported that the merger of AFPAA and the VA had been successfully implemented. The main objective of the merger was to improve service with a single point of contact providing a coherent, joined-up service and reducing the risk of individuals falling between the two agencies. Savings were a secondary objective.</p> <p>2. Improvements had already been realised with the ability to transfer calls between the two enquiry centres and closer working between the various groups. It was recognised that these were small beginnings and that the task ahead would be to ensure that further improvements are achieved.</p> <p>3. It was planned that there would be closer</p>	

	<p>integration with a new IT structure being developed; however, a lot more work was required. Veterans organisations had been consulted during the merger through an Implementation Customer group. A Veterans Customer Advisory Group had been established for the new agency, which had its first meeting in May 2007. The SPVA welcomed the views and ideas from the Veterans organisations on how the service provided could be improved.</p> <p>4. The Chairman COBSEO stated that the Veterans organisations were very pleased to be part of the SPVA Board and Veterans Customer Advisory Group.</p>	COBSEO/ ex-Service Organisations
<p>7 Devolved Administration Reports</p>	<p>1. The Scottish Executive reported that there was a new Government in Scotland with an SNP minority. Stewart Maxwell MSP, as Minister for Communities and Sport, had responsibility for veterans' issues. He had already shown a particular interest in veterans' issues, especially health and social welfare.</p> <p>2. The Veterans Day event was scheduled for 29 and 30 June in Dundee. There were concerns that the Executive had not been consulted about the choice of the Scottish event and that local organisers had an expectation that the Executive would provide funding. The Executive asked to be kept more closely informed of the developments for Veterans Day 2008.</p> <p>3. The Executive identified the Veterans Programme Scotland Steering Group as a good example of cooperation between the Executive, veterans organisations and MOD which had already resulted in positive developments. The Executive was still awaiting the updated Veterans Work Plan and sight of the SPVA Knowledge Map.</p> <p>4. D VPU stated that the MOD had not provided full funding for any of the events planned for Veterans Day. The funding provided took the form of pump priming and organisers were expected to identify themselves other sources of funding.</p> <p>5. The National Assembly for Wales was not represented at the Forum and it was agreed that the report submitted by The National Assembly for Wales would be issued as an annex to the minutes.</p>	SDD VPU
<p>8</p>	<p>1. Combat Stress referred to an article in the</p>	

<p>Any Other Business</p>	<p>Sunday Times containing claims about the number of suicides amongst Falklands veterans and asked about the VPU sponsored suicides study.</p> <p>2. D VPU advised that the study identifies suicides or open verdicts recorded on Armed Forces personnel that had left Service since 1996. A retrospective study on Falklands veterans was possible but complex and costly.</p> <p>3. D VPU commented that there had been a study to monitor mortality among 1990/91 Gulf veterans and there was no evidence of higher suicide rates for that population but that MOD was not complacent about the issue. Combat Stress considered that the issue of the Falklands veterans still needed to be addressed and Minister agreed to look into it.</p> <p>4. No other issues were raised. Minister thanked all for their attendance and thanked the ex-Service organisations for the valuable work they performed on behalf of their members and clients.</p>	<p>D VPU</p>
<p>9 Arrangements for Next Meeting</p>	<p>The next meeting was scheduled for 10.30 on 4 December 2007, venue to be confirmed</p>	<p>VPU Sec</p>