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August 2006

See Distribution

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE VETERANS FORUM
HELD IN THE VICTORY SERVICES CLUB ON TUESDAY 18 JULY 2006
AT 1430 HOURS

Present	COBSEO Executive Committee		
	AVM Tony Stables	Chairman COBSEO	
	Robert Leader	Vice Chairman COBSEO/ St Dunstan's	
	Cdre Barry Bryant	Seafarers UK	
	Maj Gen Sir Evelyn Webb-Carter	ABF	
	ACM Sir David Cousins	RAFBF	
	Sue Freeth	TRBL	
	Lt Col Jerome Church	BLESMA	
	Cdre Toby Elliott	Combat Stress	
	Capt Malcolm Farrow	FPS	
	Cdr Paddy McClurg	RNA	
	Jenny Green	War Widows Association	
	Maj Rosemary Warne	Secretary COBSEO	
	Other Government Departments		
	Robert Finnegan	DCA	
	Andrew Palethorpe	DoH	
	Lt Cdr Phil Hally	HMT	
	John Duggan	Welsh Assembly Government	
	Neil Langhorn	Scottish Executive	
	Rachel Dickenson	DCLG	
	Ministry of Defence		
	RAdm Peter Wilkinson	DS Sec	Chairman
	Tim Taylor	Veterans Agency	
	Jonathon Iremonger	DVPU	
	Dr Anne Braidwood	D SP Pol (Medical Adviser)	
	Peter Davies	D SP Pol Pensions	
	Chris Williams	DMSD Med FS-D	
	Air Cdre Philip Miles	D Resettlement	
	Mary Bevis	DD VPU/DS Sec	
	Piers Jones	DD VPU	
	Cdr Graham Jardine	AD VPU Veterans	
	Cdr Ian MacGillivray	DGMC-DCP Comm Plans	
	Liz Moore	VPU Sec	}Secretariat
	Phil Hoare	VPU Sec Support	}

Apologies	<p>Tom Watson MP Jeremy Williams Chris Butcher Michael Watters Siobhan Larkin Jonquil Dartnall Kenneth Robbie Angela Ruggles Kate Rounce John Clarke Geoff Marlow</p> <p>Alan Nicholson Joy Dalkin Maj Gen Andrew Cumming Maj Gen James Gordon</p> <p>Air Cdre Ed Jarron Jim Panton Brig Ian Townsend Air Marshal David Pocock Tracey Vennai</p>	<p>Minister for Veterans PS/ Minister for Veterans LGA FCO DCLG Welsh Office, DCA Scotland Office, DCA DfES DCMS Northern Ireland Executive Welsh Assembly Government Scottish Executive Home Office SSAFA Forces Help FPS</p> <p>RAFA Veterans Scotland TRBL DCDS (Pers) DD VPU Veterans</p>	
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Item (a)	Discussion and Decisions (b)	Action (c)
1 Introduction	<p>1. DS Sec welcomed all present to the meeting, particularly those attending for the first time, and presented apologies from the Minister for Veterans who was not able to attend as he was required in the House of Commons for a Government Statement.</p> <p>2. DS Sec noted that this had been due to be the last Forum to be attended by Brig Ian Townsend, Director General RBL. DS Sec wished to record his thanks to Brig Townsend for the contribution he had made to Veterans issues and wish him well for the future.</p>	
2 Minutes and Actions arising from Last Meeting	<p>1. The minutes were accepted as a true record of the previous meeting.</p> <p>2. <u>Para 3 – Review of Strategy for Veterans.</u> The revised Strategy was amended to reflect the comments received and published at the Veterans Plenary on 22 March 2006. Action complete.</p> <p>3. <u>Para 4 – Annual Report/Work Plan 2006.</u></p>	

	<p>The 2005 Veterans Programme Report and 2006 Work Plan were amended to reflect the comments received and a copy of the 2005 Report was circulated to those who attended the Veterans Plenary. D VPU noted that for the future it was intended to have clearer objectives and deliverables for the Veterans Programme and advised that Veterans organisations would be consulted. Action complete.</p> <p>4. <u>Para 5 – Research Strategy.</u> Workstream 2 was being used as a vehicle to keep the veterans community informed of progress in implementing the Research Strategy. DMSD Med FS-D would provide an update on the new mental health initiative for demobilised reservists under the Workstream 2 report at Agenda Item 3. Action ongoing.</p>	DD VPU
<p>3 Veterans Workstream Updates a. Transition</p>	<p>a1. AD VPU Veterans reported that there had been an increase in the number of users of the Career Transition Partnership (CTP), which was working well. This increase had been due to the RAF redundancies. The phased discharge of the Royal Irish (Home Service) commencing in Autumn 2006 will also bring further increases.</p> <p>a2. There had been renewed focus on support for medically discharged Service leavers. It was intended that the overhaul of the Army Sickness Absence Management process would bring benefits to medical dischargees Further action is now needed to draw together the administrative and clinical aspects of medical discharges. D/Resettlement was leading coordination of this Seamless Transition work, with Combat Stress representing the ex-Service organisations on the Defence Medical Discharges Policy Committee. D/Resettlement stressed that should the ex-Service organisations wish to raise any issues as part of this workstream they should do so via Combat Stress, providing appropriate supporting evidence.</p> <p>a3. Combat Stress noted that positive progress was being made and that the management of this as an in-service issue would benefit future veterans. It was necessary to highlight vulnerable Service leavers, not only early</p>	COBSEO/Combat Stress

<p>b. Support (including mental health and reservists)</p>	<p>Service leavers but also long-service personnel who reach the end of their service with mental/physical health problems and need support from the ex-Service organisations. Combat Stress had written to other ex-Service organisations as it might be necessary for ex-Service organisations to get more involved with personnel during the resettlement process. D/Resettlement did not consider this was an appropriate issue for the Defence Medical Discharge Policy Committee but had some ideas about how to take the matter forward outside of the meeting.</p> <p>a4. BLESMA sought an assurance that ‘timely’ did not necessarily mean ‘speedy’ discharge, D/Resettlement agreed that it was necessary to ensure that discharges were at the right time for the individual.</p> <p>b1. D SP Pol Medical Adviser introduced Andrew Palethorpe, DoH representative, who would be leading on the DoH initiatives, noting that the provision of support to veterans was a cross-Government responsibility not purely a matter for MOD. It was important to be involved as Government policy was being developed to ensure that veterans interests were represented. To this end, MOD had scrutinised a number of Green and White papers on health and social welfare during the past year. With an ageing population, there was a particular focus on how to respond to the health and social welfare needs of older people. This was very relevant to the veterans’ community given the increasing number of older veterans which would increase the call on services. Mental health was also a priority for the Government, both generally and in relation to veterans.</p> <p>b2. Referring to a note on Individual Budgets circulated at the meeting, DoH advised that this was a pilot scheme and that decisions on its future would depend on the outcome of the evaluation. The scheme would be an extension of the direct payment scheme (self directed care) and users would take control of services and their need of those services. However, not all responsibility would be transferred to individuals and there would be support for those that</p>	<p>D/Resettlement</p>
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needed it. Three of the pilots already running offered opportunities for inclusion of veterans and discussions were taking place with a number of ex-Service organisations.

b3. Combat Stress expressed concern that the initiative would require Welfare Officers to assume a greater role and asked whether that would be funded. DoH advised that they would be contracting for the provision of such services with external suppliers. TRBL voiced concern that not all ex-Service organisations would be able to undertake the mediating role and might not be able to access the funding stream.

b4. DMSD Med FS-D reported that research undertaken by Kings College London into the health of veterans of the Iraq War, both regulars and reservists, had identified a difference in the incidence of mental illness amongst reservists, unlike regulars, compared to the control groups. MOD had agreed, therefore, that this needed to be addressed and an announcement was accordingly made in May 2006 that all reservists demobilised since Jan 03 would be offered a mental health assessment by the DMS. If PTSD related to operations was identified that DMSD could treat on an outpatient basis then the reservists would be offered treatment, which would be provided outside the NHS otherwise they would be referred to the NHS. The scheme would run for a period of three years and DMSD were working with DoH in England and the Devolved Administrations to identify a range of providers.

b5. D SP Pol Medical Adviser reported that the four UK health departments, Combat Stress and clinical experts had been involved in post-HASCAS work on future mental health services for veterans. A proposed model of care which would involve the voluntary, public and private sectors had been formulated and a meeting to consider how to take this forward was due to be held on 3 August.

b6. Combat Stress welcomed the developments on future provision of mental health services for veterans but were concerned about the delay in implementing the initiative for reservists.

	Chairman undertook to seek feedback where possible.	
4 Veterans Day 06, 07 and beyond	<p>1. D VPU said that that Veterans Day 06 had been a steep learning curve for all involved and a lot was achieved in a short time. Lessons learned would be taken into account in planning for future Veterans Days. There had been good media coverage although overshadowed to some extent by events in Afghanistan. The regional events went well although some groups had sought funding for events that did not fully reflect the key Veterans Day messages. It was recognised that the London event could have been more focussed on Veterans themselves, although it had facilitated positive interaction between generations and had provided some worthwhile educational focus for school children. Next year's event needed to be better defined, with a simpler message, a greater focus on veterans themselves and better national advertising.</p> <p>2. Chairman COBSEO said that D VPU's comments reflected COBSEO views. He stressed the importance of establishing a project team and confirming plans for Veterans Day 07, including how to link with the Falklands 25th Anniversary, as soon as possible.</p> <p>3. The Welsh Assembly Government underlined the importance of early decisions on Veterans Day 07 so that events could be properly organised and there was time to consider where the events could be held and how they could be linked to other initiatives, and to ensure the involvement of ex-Service and public/private organisations.</p> <p>4. The Scottish Executive reported that a successful event had been held in Dundee although more notice would have been welcome, They had only recently become aware of plans to commemorate the Falklands 25th Anniversary, and stressed again the importance of early communication of plans for next year and of clarification of the position on funding. The Scottish Executive did not have a veterans budget so would be looking for additional resources if a major event was expected in</p>	<p>All</p> <p>D VPU</p> <p>D VPU</p>

	<p>Scotland. D VPU recognised the need to formalise funding arrangements. Although defence was not a devolved matter, it was important to ensure that government organisations across the UK were involved in veterans' initiatives.</p>	
<p>5 Communications a. Veterans Communications Strategy</p>	<p>a1. D VPU said that the communications strategy had been developed to raise awareness of the cross-Government policy for veterans and to encourage take-up by those who need support. DGMC-DCP Comms Plans advised that media analysis undertaken in June showed mainly positive coverage with veterans' contribution to society the dominant positive theme. Of more negative coverage, the dominant theme had been the perceived lack of support provided to veterans. A working group chaired by DGMC would be formed to ensure delivery of the communications strategy, focusing on objectives for the coming year and the work being undertaken for the veterans' community.</p> <p>a2. Combat Stress considered that there should be greater focus in the strategy on the young veteran and on the relevance of their role in today's society. The War Widows Association commented that it should also address the needs of war widows and their dependants. The Welsh Assembly Government highlighted the importance of raising voluntary sector awareness of the additional sources of help available for veterans. TRBL noted that the phase 1 research corroborated TRBL's own research undertaken in 2005 which had identified areas where more work was necessary.</p> <p>a3. Forum members were invited to note the strategy and to forward any questions or comments through D VPU or DD VPU to DGMC by 31 July.</p> <p>a4. CE/VA advised that the Veterans Awareness Conference and associated regional publicity campaign in Newcastle had been successful in raising awareness of the services available to veterans and the VA had recorded a 30% increase in the number of calls from the</p>	<p>All</p>

<p>b. Central Office of Information Veterans Survey</p>	<p>North East. The next conference and publicity campaign would be held in Birmingham.</p> <p>a5. BLESMA commented that Newcastle had demonstrated the successful combination of a targeted media campaign and an awareness conference and asked for a proper structured programme that would include London. TRBL stated that there was a danger of 'preaching to the converted' and that the challenge was how to get the message across to the wider audience. D VPU acknowledged that there were real challenges in getting the message of veterans' support and services through to certain hard-to-reach elements of the veterans' community e.g. those who did not read the press.</p> <p>b1. DD VPU advised that the last survey of public perception of veterans had taken place in 2002. As part of the communications strategy a similar survey was undertaken in June 2006 before the publicity for Veterans Day had been released. The key points identified were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Lack of understanding of term veteran – majority thought it referred to an older person. ii. Poor awareness of the VA and its services. iii. Perception of support. Around half of the interviewees considered that veterans received insufficient support from the Government, thought to be based mainly on media coverage of high profile cases. <p>b2. DD VPU went on to say that this raised issues about public understanding of the role of charities in supporting veterans too. All of these issues would need to be considered in the communications strategy.</p> <p>b3. Chairman COBSEO recognised the problem with the term 'veteran' and suggested that it should be explained in the communications strategy. Many ex-Service personnel, in particular reservists and younger people, do not consider themselves to be veterans. Seafarers UK noted that the Merchant Mariners had been very happy to be brought under the veterans banner.</p>	
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	<p>b4. Both the Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly Government asked if the survey could be broken down to identify how interviewees in Scotland and Wales answered the survey. DD VPU agreed to refer back to the COI.</p> <p>b5. TRBL stated that it was necessary to consider families, to ensure that they recognise they are part of the veterans' community and can access support. D VPU acknowledged that families are important as users of services.</p>	DD VPU
<p>6 Any Other Business</p>	<p>1. CE/VA advised that the Minister for Veterans had announced on 17 July that a new organisation would be created by the merger of the VA and AFPAA. It would improve service to users as there would be one point of contact for veterans and another for serving personnel and processes would be more joined up. CE/VA stated that he was very committed to sustaining, and improving, the VA service to veterans. No decision had been taken about the title of the new organisation, although it was recognised that the term 'veteran' should be incorporated.</p> <p>2. D/Resettlement advised that the issue of access to information on Service Leavers had been raised with the Minister by TRBL and that D/Resettlement had been asked to undertake some work on the issue. It would be taken forward on the basis of compliance with the Data Protection Act. D/Resettlement would be asking COBSEO for a list of the key charities that could be identified to Service leavers, who could in turn refer them to other organisations where appropriate.</p> <p>3. Secretary COBSEO advised that it was the last Veterans Forum she would attend. DS Sec recorded his thanks to Maj Warne for her contribution to COBSEO and the Veterans Forum and wished her well for the future.</p> <p>4. DS Sec noted that progress was being made across the Veterans Programme work streams and that it was important to ensure that veterans recognised themselves as veterans. He thanked all for their attendance.</p>	D/Resettlement/ COBSEO

7 Arrangements for Next Meeting	The next meeting has been scheduled for 10.00 on 5 December 2006, venue to be confirmed	VPU Sec
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