

D/VPU/7/5

December 2005

See Distribution

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE VETERANS FORUM
HELD IN MAIN BUILDING, MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
ON TUESDAY 6 DECEMBER AT 0900 HOURS**

Present		Minister for Veterans	Chairman
	Don Touhig		
	COBSEO Executive Committee		
	Maj Gen Mike Shellard Robert Leader	Chairman COBSEO Vice Chairman COBSEO/ St Dunstan's	
	Cdre Barry Bryant	King George's Fund for Sailors	
	Maj Gen Sir Evelyn Webb- Carter	ABF	
	Brig Ian Townsend	TRBL	
	Cathy Walker	SSAFA Forces Help	
	Cdre Toby Elliott	Combat Stress	
	Maj Gen James Gordon	FPS	
	Jim Panton	Veterans Scotland	
	Ros Campbell	War Widows Association	
	Air Cdre Edward Jarron	RAFA	
	Maj Rosemary Warne	Secretary COBSEO	
	Other Government Departments		
	Chris Ball	DCA	
	Kenneth Robbie	Scotland Office, DCA	
	Ben Morrin	DoH	
	Phil Hally	HMT	
	Geoff Marlow	National Assembly for Wales	
	Alan Nicholson	Scottish Executive	
	John Clarke	Northern Ireland Executive	
	Joy Dalkin	Home Office	
	Ministry of Defence		
	RAdm Peter Wilkinson	DS Sec	
	Wendy Stewart	Veterans Agency	
	Jonathon Iremonger	DVPU	
	Dr Anne Braidwood	D SP Pol (Medical Adviser)	
	Peter Davies	D SP Pol Pensions	
	Air Cdre Philip Miles	D Resettlement	

	Mary Bevis Piers Jones Tracey Vennai Jeremy Williams Caroline Cawthorne Norman Marchant Phil Hoare	DD VPU/DS Sec DD VPU DD VPU Veterans PS/Minister for Veterans VPU Sec VPU Vets-Proj5 VPU Sec Support	} } Secretariat }
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Apologies	Chris Butcher Michael Watters Siobhan Larkin Jonquil Dartnall Paula Kitching Julie Moore John Nicholson Carol Gardner Cdre Barry Leighton Lt Col Jerome Church Air Marshal David Pocock John Sinfield Lt Col Peter Willis	LGA FCO ODPM Welsh Office, DCA DfES DCMS Northern Ireland Executive DWP RNA BLESMA DCDS (Pers) Head of DS Sec(Sec) AD VPU Veterans	
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Item (a)	Discussion and Decisions (b)	Action (c)
1 Opening Address by Minister for Veterans	<p>1. Minister for Veterans welcomed all present to the meeting, particularly those attending for the first time, and gave a short update on a number of current veterans' issues. In particular, he highlighted the extension of the Veterans Challenge Fund and encouraged organisations to make bids though it for financial support for appropriate activities.</p> <p>2. He also drew attention to the extension of the eligibility criteria for the Armed Forces veterans badge to include service up to and including 1954. He hoped that this would assist in breaking down the perception that veterans were not just those who served during the two World Wars.</p> <p>3. The Minister referred to his recent appearance at the Public Administration Select Committee where he announced a review of the criteria that had been used for deciding payments to civilians interned by the Japanese during World War Two. He hoped to be able to make a public statement on progress soon.</p> <p>4. The Minister stated that he was aware of the concerns of many of those present at the possibility of a potential merger between the VA and AFPAA and</p>	

	<p>assured them that he had taken on board the points that had been. After careful consideration, he had decided that the merger as described in the consultation paper should not proceed. Instead, he proposed to create an organisation with a single back office, but with two distinct customer-facing front offices. However, in formal governance terms, there would only be one organisation. Minister advised that he would need to consult cross-Government on this issue.</p>	
<p>2 Minutes and Actions arising from Last Meeting</p>	<p>1. The minutes were accepted as a true record of the previous meeting. The actions arising from them would be addressed as agenda items in the current meeting.</p>	
<p>3 Review of the Strategy for Veterans</p>	<p>1. D VPU explained that as the Minister announced at the last Forum meeting a review of the Strategy for Veterans had been underway and a revised version of the original Strategy document circulated for comment Forum members prior to the meeting. All recipients were encouraged to respond if they had any comments. Responses to date appeared to indicate that the principal aims of the Strategy were still sound although there was scope for defining clearer objectives and for doing certain things better. The possibility of developing some harder, measurable targets would be explored as would the scope for greater in-Service feedback to assist in focussing the Strategy.</p> <p>2. Both Chairman COBSEO and TRBL endorsed the general approach of the Strategy, including recognition of the importance of closer engagement with all parties in taking it forward.</p>	<p>All</p>
<p>4 Annual Report/Work Plan 2006</p>	<p>1. DDVPU/DS Sec explained that drafts of the 2005 Veterans Programme Report and 2006 Work Plan circulated prior to the meeting were very much a first cut and comments had been requested by 20 December. Both documents followed the same format as the previous year. The main difference was that the Work Plan had been slimmed down in light of comments from COBSEO, with the focus on priorities and activities that need to be addressed and actively managed rather than on ongoing work. It was intended that, subject to any comments, both documents would be forwarded to Task Force members for endorsement early in the New Year and that the Programme Report would be circulated to</p>	<p>All</p>

	<p>those attending the Plenary in March 2006. The Minister highlighted the need to share the Plan across Government.</p> <p>2. Chairman COBSEO welcomed the refinement of the Work Plan and urged greater involvement from other Government Departments as Work Stream 2 (Support) was particularly dependent upon their participation.</p>	
<p>5 Research Strategy</p>	<p>1. DD VPU said that he would welcome feedback on the Research Strategy summary that had been circulated previously. The next step would be to identify the priority subjects for research. It would be important to do this in a cross-Governmental context. Noting that a number of proposals had been received, DD VPU said that a meeting would be convened early in the New Year under the auspices of Workstream 2 to refine these and any other proposals that Forum members wished to submit.</p> <p>2. Minister stated that the Department needed to be more proactive in its support of reservist veterans and that he believed the VA should be the first point of call for reservists. TRBL indicated that they were keen to be involved closely in any actions falling out from this.</p> <p>3. Minister agreed that it was important to deepen the relationship between Government and the ex-Service organisations. He then raised the issue of alcohol abuse and reported that he had met with the Director of Alcohol Concern, and that they had agreed to hold a further meeting in the New Year to explore the scope for collaborating more closely for the benefit of veterans. This meeting will take place in the New Year. Combat Stress welcomed Minister's contact with Alcohol Concern. However, he explained that a lack of funding was creating a barrier to appropriate treatment such as detox programmes. Minister stated that funding was a problem on a national scale and that he was keen to explore the scope for access to funds that could be used to address specific problems such as this when necessary.</p> <p>4. Combat Stress then referred to the issue of TA soldiers who have returned from Op Telic and the concerns that had been raised with the Surgeon General and others that they were not getting the help they need. The Combat Stress view was this</p>	<p>All</p>

	<p>help should be provided by the Defence Medical Services. D SP Pol (Medical Adviser) reported that mental health is currently one of the Government's key priorities. In October 2003, following the beginning of TELIC, the RCN raised the DH Ministers the question of support to their members who were also reservists and who were even then returning from OP TELIC duty. There was a subsequent RCN conference on mental health and reservists and Departments agreed that this needed to be addressed. The Surgeon General would be making a Submission to Minister early in the New Year.</p> <p>5. Minister agreed that further work was required from the MOD side and noted that the Surgeon General already had work in hand. Much of the evidence on this subject was anecdotal and therefore the true extent of the problem was not clear.</p> <p>6. D VPU welcomed TRBL's research paper, noting in particular the extent of problems among the elderly that had been identified. He recognised that there were areas that needed further investigation, though some of these appeared to be more problems of age rather than specific to veterans. It was agreed that there would be value in cooperation in taking this work forward</p>	<p>Combat Stress</p>
<p>6 Gulf Veterans Illnesses</p>	<p>1. In response to a request from COBSEO the Minister updated the meeting on the recent Government statement concerning Gulf War Syndrome (GWS).</p> <p>2. He confirmed that, in relation to the case of Mr Daniel Martin, the Department had accepted the use of GWS as an umbrella term for illnesses suffered by veterans in connection with their service in the 1991 Gulf conflict. It was hoped that formal recognition of this link would help bring closure for those affected. Research conducted by Britain and other coalition countries supported the Department's view that GWS is not a discrete medical condition. However, Minister stated that the Department retained an open mind on the matter and would be willing to revisit the matter were new scientific evidence to come to light in the future. At present the Department's view on GWS had not changed and research would continue.</p> <p>3. TRBL welcomed continued research into GWS and supported its use as an umbrella term. He</p>	

	<p>suggested an audit of all available research on GWS. SSAFA Forces Help and Combat Stress cautioned that by focussing too intensely on research into the causes of GWS the actual treatment of those affected can be overlooked. Minister reiterated the need to focus efforts on support and treatment for those affected – to address quality of life issues.</p> <p>4. D SP Pol (Medical Adviser) stated that early research on the latest Op Telic cohort does not suggest that personnel are returning with a similar group of symptoms. By being involved with this study of people we could pick up any such effect quickly. She was hopeful that similar research and monitoring would be the practice in any future operational deployments to ensure that any adverse effects are picked up quickly.</p>	
<p>7 Work with Other Government Departments (a) Devolved Administrations</p>	<p>a1. The Scottish Executive reported that good progress had been made in engaging with veterans' organisations: a prime example of which was the establishment of the Veterans Scotland Steering Group, a forum for discussion involving MOD, the Scottish Executive and Veterans Scotland. The challenge would now be to turn the words into action. 2005 had seen an increased awareness of social inclusion issues with other Government Departments and it was important to now build on this. Overall, the Scottish Executive has developed a closer relationship with veterans' organisations and MoD, recognising that although policy is usually the responsibility of MoD, service provision often lies with the DAs.</p> <p>a2. The National Assembly for Wales stated that they had a new Minister who was very keen on helping out with veterans' issues. A 'Reaching Out to Veterans' conference had been held in Cardiff in July, and a Welsh Veterans Focus Group had been established which met in October. There was enthusiasm for convening these groups on a regular basis. There were plans through the Wales Homeless Veterans Group to establish referral pathways for homeless veterans. A letter had gone to health professionals in order to raise awareness of priority treatment for veterans.</p> <p>a3. Minister said that he was very encouraged by the work and response of the Devolved Administrations and asked that every effort was made to maintain this</p>	

<p>(b) Reducing Re-offending</p>	<p>momentum</p> <p>b1. The Home Office reported that in the past, a key obstacle to the work being undertaken for the Prison In-Reach project had been the issue of access into prisons for ex-Service organisations, with prisoners having to use family entitlement visits in some cases if they wished to see advisors from these organisations. A new draft Prison Service Order had now been put forward for ratification which would recognise veteran's organisations as official visitors to prisoners in the same way as lawyers, solicitors etc. This move was welcomed by TRBL.</p>	
<p>8 Veterans Awareness Events 2006</p>	<p>1. Minister commented on the success of events in 2005, recognising that it had been a particularly significant year due to the 60th anniversary of the end of WW2. Whilst efforts should continue to be made to raise awareness and to engage the public on veterans' issues, Minister cautioned against being over ambitious about what could be achieved in future years and spoke of a more modest approach in 2006. The importance of promoting regional events was highlighted.</p> <p>2. DS Sec reiterated the need for expectation management in 2006. Plans were being made to hold a veterans event limited to the ceremony to mark the 150th anniversary of the inception of the VC/GC. A further theme was to be healthy living. The main event would take place on 27 June 2006 at the Imperial War Museum. It was intended to have a smaller scale version of this year's St James' Park display with an educational bias to promote cross-generational understanding. Regions would be encouraged to plan their own parallel events and MOD would be liaising with ex-Service organisations to ensure a combined effort.</p> <p>3. Minister acknowledged that the veterans' event would evolve during the planning process and stressed the need to roll it out nationally to prevent it being too London-centric. Everything must be done to raise the profile of the events and of veterans generally. There was a need to do more to engage the media especially at a local/regional level and he queried whether TRBL networks could also be utilised.</p> <p>4. FPS welcomed the proposed smaller scale of</p>	

	<p>events as, in his view, the 2005 events placed a huge load on smaller organisations. He also suggested that publicity and communications should try to ensure that the focus was not solely on WW2 veterans.</p> <p>5. Combat Stress suggested that a longer term strategy for commemoration be formulated rather than operating on a year by year basis. DS Sec confirmed that a team has been established to take this forward and it was already looking at prospective plans for 2007 to mark the 25th Anniversary of the Falkland's Conflict.</p>	
<p>9 Arrangements for Next Meeting</p>	<p>The next meeting has been scheduled for 14.00 on 13th June 2006.</p>	