

Social Security Act 1989

North East War Pensions Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 3rd August 2005 at Fenham Barracks,
Newcastle upon Tyne

Present:

Capt. Paul Kingham (PK) **- Chair**
Mr David Robson (DRo)
Lt.Col. John Heron (JH)
Mr Michael Hindmarsh (MH)
Mrs Sheila Crosby (SC)
Major. A.J.P Watson (AW)
Mr David Luke (DL)
Mrs Vera Cowen (VC)
Major Bill Campbell (BC)
Mr Tony Tatum (AT)

In Attendance:

Mr Alan Heron (AH) **- Committee Manager**
Mrs Fiona Wilson (FW) **- Regional Welfare Manager**
Mr John Falcus (JF) **-Welfare Manager**
Miss Trudy Taylor (TT) **- Clerk to the Committee**

1.0

Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Mrs Marion Mullen - Vice Chair, Mr Brian Finlayson, Mr Prof. Derek Roberts, Michael, Donne, Mr Garry Lowe, Mr Jeff Lodge, Dr Mike Fisher and Mr Geoff Rossman.

2.0

Appointment of New Members

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the newly appointed Committee members and Fiona Wilson to the meeting. An individual introduction of both new and existing members lead by the Chair followed.

3.0

Declaration of Interest

The Chair advised Members of the requirement to declare any conflicts of interest with the War Pensions Committee from the outset and reminded all present of the Statutory Instrument.

4.0

Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on 19.5.05

The Minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as a true record. The Chair suggested that minutes should in future be incremental to better aid reference. **AP. Clerk**

5.0

Matters Arising

5.1

Recruitment exercise

The Chair advised of the successful conclusion of the recent recruitment exercise and requested the advertisement should now be removed from the VA Website.**AP. Clerk**

5.2

Council Tax Disregards

The Chair advised of the ongoing work for the Council Tax Disregards. Following a recent successful meeting with John Stopher of Hexham Council on June 7th 2005 at which a number of issues were discussed regarding awareness both for the public and council staff and although the issue of Council Tax disregards is not new to them (background disproportionate affect of finance if agreed given the rural nature of the area) he agreed to ask the Council to review their policy on this matter. Chair asked that the list of the current Disregards be distributed to new members with the minutes. **AP. Clerk**

5.3

WPC Notes for Members

Chair apologised that copies were not available for new members and explained that amendment to the publication had been anticipated but was now delayed pending further revisions.

5.4

Future of the War Pensions Committee

Members were advised that to date there has been no feedback from the minister or the Veterans Agency on the recommendation of the steering group. Details will be circulated to members as soon as a response is provided. This subject is likely to head the Agenda for the Chairs meeting in September. New members provided confirmation to the receipt of the steering group report. **AP. Clerk**

6.0

Chairs Report

6.1

It has been a relatively quiet period since the Committee last met. Tony Burke, Director of Operations at the VA has moved on, a difficult man to replace both on top of management issues and in tune with issues relevant to Pensioners and the VA/WPWS. That there was little to report at this stage was hardly surprising with some major changes being studied and the outcomes awaited e.g. the proposed merger between the VA and AFPAA about which nothing further has been received from the Agency following the study document circulated to the sub-committee following the last meeting. A copy of the submission made by the Trade Union on behalf of their members has been received (Copies available to interested members)

6.2

Provision of Medical Services

There has been an update on arrangements for obtaining medical reports for War Pensioners. A new contract will commence with the existing supplier Atos Origin on 31 August 2005 which will introduce enhanced levels of service aimed at creating a faster and higher quality service. More information to be provided at the next Chairs Conference. Members reminded to take the opportunity to put forward any issues they would like raised on behalf of the committee by the chair.

6.3

Best Practice

The chair reported on the initiative to promote best practice and continues improvement for WPC's at the last meeting. Unfortunately it is felt that this had perhaps not been accepted in quite the spirit that it had been offered. The proposed structure for implementation and terminology used in the documentation were not to everyone's liking. Following a number of letters it has been decided to pursue the issue no further on the basis that some thought it may impinge on the independence of the WPC's.

6.4

Letter Templates for use by the WPC's

Eric Newman who addressed our last meeting has produced 2 templates for use in raising awareness, which are offered for adaptation should we wish to use them. One is of a general nature and the other addresses the provision of priority treatment for pensioners. Copies of these to be issued to members with the minutes. **AP. Clerk**

6.5

War Pensions Quarterly Statistics March 2005

These were published in July and whilst the whole document is not required by members, although available should you wish to see it. The Introduction and statistical tables are an interesting reference. These are to be circulated with the minutes. (pages 1-13only) **AP. Clerk**

7.0

Welfare Service Report

7.1

The report given by Alan heron is at Annex A to these minutes.

8.0

Publicity Sub Committee Report

The report given by Lt. Col John Heron on the activities of the Sub Committee is at Annex B

8.1

The chair thanked John Heron for his report and asked if there was any merit in forwarding a copy of the Photograph of the newly opened VA flower bed in Durham to the Agency for use in internal/external publications as it was quite a unique piece publicity.

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Sub -Committees

The Chair explained the remit of the standing of the sub committees and their mandates for the benefit of the newly appointed and existing members alike asking everyone to examine these to see where they could best support the activities of the WPC. The success of this mechanism over the past year was commented upon.

1. Publicity - remit:

- a. **To devise and implement ways of raising public awareness in the N.E., to all aspects of the War Pensions Scheme, the welfare of pensioners and the profile of this committee.**

2. Consultation/Projects – remit:

- a. **To provide feedback on behalf of the committee where documents are circulated for consultation.**
- b. **To undertake evaluation and research projects as required and report back to the committee.**

3. Panel cases – remit:

- a. To provide a standing sub-committee authorised to hear any panel.
- b. To be the first point of referral for any pensioner seeking the support of the WPC.

AP 1. Clerk. Members to notify which groups they feel their skills would be best harnessed by.

AP.2 Clerk. Pass to Raising Awareness rep. for Newcastle WPWS

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Future Events

10.1

A Diary of Future Events for 2005 and 2006 is at Annex C.

10.2

Bill Campbell advised of Trafalgar Day on 21st and 23rd October 2005. This is involving a dinner at the Park Hotel (Tickets £20.00) on the evening of the 21st and a parade and wreath laying ceremony at Tynemouth Priory and the Collingwood Monument. Further details to be forwarded to the WPWS should any members require further advice.

10.3

Dave Robson advised of the Tyne Cruise, which was discussed in the previous minutes. The event, which has been funded by the National Lottery through Home front recall, is going ahead at 11.30am to 3.30pm on the 10th September 2005. The Event will be available to 120 WWII Veterans and Carers. Names can be submitted for this event to SSAFA Forces Help, Mea House, Newcastle upon Tyne. It was noted that funding for transport to this event is available but limited.

10.4

The viability of staging an event during 2006, aside from the regular annual events, was discussed. success of the committee rides on the mechanism of the sub committees, and the chair requested consideration be made by new and existing members to The primary objective being to provide a break/ event completely free of charge for Veterans and secondly to provide a PR opportunity for the WPC, WPWS and Veterans Agency. The Chair would like any possibilities/ideas to be reported back at the next meeting without committing us to anything at this stage.

10.5

'The Events Calendar' published on the VA Website was discussed and again members were asked to put forward events for inclusion. Currently this does not accurately reflect the activity level within the region. The WPWS offered to assist with the input for anyone who could not access the internet or who would rather not publish the events themselves.

10.6

Chair commented that the veterans week had been overshadowed by the events to commemorate the end of WW2 and we would have to wait to see what profile it offered next year.

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Any Other Business

11.1

Bill Campbell reported that John Harrison, the newly elected MP for North Tyneside, is very supportive of Veterans and has stated he is committed to being involved with the local veterans committee. It was agreed this was an excellent link.

11.2

Tony Tatum (new member) advised that he is very keen to become established within the committee and offered his full support in any forthcoming events. Tony was thanked for his support and guaranteed plenty of work in the future. Tony has also been forwarded to the Raising Awareness sub committee along side another new member David Luke.

11.3

Sheila Crosby asked that updated contact details be issued with the minutes to include the new members. **AP. Clerk**

11.4

Alisdair Watson discussed recent television coverage of PTSD and requested clarification of a statement made with respect to some areas in the country being a 'Postcode Lottery', in that widely differing standards of care were reported. It was agreed that the Chair would take this point forward to the local representative for Combat Stress and reported back. Mr Watson advised of a leading expert in PTSD for the north East of England who's details he would obtain and pass to the committee and WPWS for future reference.

Date, Time and Venue of next meeting

Next meeting to be held on 7 December 2005 venue to be announced.

Close

3.50pm