

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE WEST MIDLANDS WAR PENSIONS
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 24th MAY 2005 AT
BIRMINGHAM WPWO, EDGBASTON, BIRMINGHAM
AT 11.00 AM**

Present:

**Mike Burrows BEM – Chairman
Harold Canning MBE – Vice Chairman
John Atherton MBE
Margaret Britton
Fred Davies
Edward Drake
Ken Fisher
Ray Griffiths
Alison Hine
Derek Johnson
Gary Kibblewhite
Stan Taylor**

In Attendance:

**Pat Cox – Committee Manager
Sue Rivington – Clerk to the Committee**

STATUTORY RULES AND ORDERS

Copies of the Statutory Rules and Orders were tabled for the information of members.

1. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed members to the 6th meeting of the West Midlands WPC, and introduced Margaret Britton, attending her first meeting. Mrs Britton had served with the Queen Alexandra Nursing Corps and has been a volunteer with SSAFA-FHS for the past 22 years.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Bob Belding and Verene Hood.

3. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest of a financial or pecuniary nature.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting, having previously been circulated, were signed by the Chairman as a true and accurate record of the meeting held on 22nd May 2005. Proposed by – John Atherton. Seconded by – Ken Fisher.

5. REVIEW OF ACTION POINTS

a) Consultation

b) Raise Awareness

AP3 02/05 Social Event Cleared

See Agenda Item 6.

AP4 02/05 Veterans Awareness Week Ongoing

The Chairman informed members that the VA website contained a calendar of events by County. Members were asked to inform the Clerk if they became aware of events taking place in their area.

c) Support and Monitor the work of the War Pensioners' Welfare Service

AP2 02/05 WM Job Shadowing Ongoing

Mrs Cox advised that the outcome of a working party between WPC Chairmen and the Welfare Service is awaited. They are to discuss the liaison between WPCs and the WPWS, which will encompass WM job shadowing. John Atherton, Harold Canning, Ken Fisher and Gary Kibblewhite expressed an interest in job shadowing.

d) Assist Individual War Pensioners and War Widows

e) General Action Points

AP1 8/04 Members Handbook Ongoing

Amendments were taken to the Chairman's Conference for their perusal. Queries were raised and the issue of the amendments will be delayed further.

AP6 11/04 WPC Co-operation **Cleared**

The question of exchange visits to other Committees was discussed by the Chairmen at their recent Conference. All were in agreement that this should take place, with a proviso that travelling distance is realistic.

AP1 02/05 WPC Co-operation **Cleared**

Ken Fisher gave a short resume of his visit to the East Midlands WPC. He made special mention of the excellent presentation given by Steve Coltman from BLESMA, on the Armed Forces Pension Scheme and the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme.

The Chairman will liaise with the East Midlands Chairman to discuss further reciprocal visits for members.

**AP1 05/05
Chairman**

AP5 02/05 Hospital Deductions **Cleared**

Discussed under A O B.

6. SUB GROUP REPORT (SOCIAL EVENTS)

Harold Canning gave a short resume of the sub group meeting held 12th April 2005. The minutes of this meeting had previously been circulated to all members.

The River Cruise on the River Severn has now been arranged and a deposit paid. The date is 23rd August 2005, commencing at 12.30pm following the next WPC meeting. The charge will be £13.75 per head, and following payment of the deposit, an amount of £764.77p remains in the account.

Letters to funds are to be issued for this event, advising them that a Christmas event will be taking place later in the year.

**AP2 05/05
Clerk**

Gary Kibblewhite felt it was necessary to ensure that the elderly and infirm were assisted when boarding the boat.

Members were in agreement, and would be 'on hand' from 11.30-12noon on the day. He advised that he will visit the boat to check the specifications and ensure any problems are covered. He will contact Mike Burrows and Harold Canning if there are any issues he needs to raise.

**AP3 05/05
Gary
Kibblewhite**

The question of the venue for the next meeting was raised, and Gary agreed to obtain a room at the Guildhall for the purpose of the meeting. Tea, coffee and water would also be requested. In view of the necessity for members to be 'on hand' to receive the guests, it was agreed to commence the meeting at 10.00am. Members were also concerned that they were not familiar with the area and some of the guests may be in the same position. Gary agreed to go to the Tourist Office and obtain Worcester road maps for issue.

**AP4 05/05
Gary
Kibblewhite**

**AP5 05/05
Gary
Kibblewhite**

The Sub-group had also considered the possibility of holding a Christmas Lunch in Hereford, and John Atherton had been tasked with finding a suitable venue. He informed members that he had checked 12 venues and only found one suitable, that being Hedley Lodge in the grounds of Belmont Abbey. A ground floor room would seat up to 200 guests and a menu could be provided for a stipulated budget. It was felt that it was not accessible by public transport, which may not be an issue, but it may be prudent to await the outcome of the response for the River Cruise, as we may wish to invite Hereford clients to Worcester for this event.

Ray Griffiths suggested that the Sub-committee may like to write to Cadbury's to see if they would be willing to sponsor a visit/ Christmas event during this memorable year.

**AP6 05/05
Sub-group**

7. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

a. Armed Forces Compensation Scheme. A booklet is available for all committee members. If after reading members feel they need more information or explanation the chairman and Pat Cox can arrange a briefing day separate to Committee meetings. If so can you let us know by Friday 3rd June.

**AP7 05/05
Members**

2. On 23 March I attended the Veteran's Forum in London.

Presentations were given on:

An Operational Update.

The Veterans Initiative.

Year of the Volunteer 2005.

Commemorative Events to Mark the End of WWII and Veterans Awareness Week.

For those ex-military amongst us the Operational Update was particularly interesting. All the presentations can be found on the Veterans Agency Website by following the links - Veterans Initiative and then Veterans Plenary.

3. The WPC Chairman's Conference was held at the Veterans Agency, Norcross on 21 and 22 April. For the first time the Chairmen held a pre-meeting meeting where the paper "The Future of the War Pension Committee" was discussed. Thank you all for your detailed comments on the draft of this document. Some were incorporated into the final document, which was completed at the end of the two days and sent to the Minister for Veterans – copy available. Unfortunately due to the General Election and change of Minister we don't expect a quick response. The new Minister for Veterans is Don Touhig MP. Prior to this meeting I also asked for comments on the document entitled "Modernising Armed Forces and Veterans Personnel Administration". This informed us that a study had been commissioned to explore whether there is scope for further improvement through the greater integration of service delivered by the Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency and the Veterans Agency. I have

received a copy of the study group's initial report. It will be discussed at the next Central Advisory Committee meeting on 8 June and all WPC Chairman have been asked to respond. Copy of the large document available if required.

At our last meeting I advised the committee that Modus Operandi between the Veterans Agency and various ex-service organisations were now in place. The WPC Chairman believe that this should also apply to WPCs and a sub committee has been set up to discuss and then produce a draft document. I will be part of that sub committee and our first meeting is to be held in Birmingham on 27 June.

4. Veterans in the Prison System Ray Griffiths and I recently attended a training day on Veterans in the Prison System. Whilst we were not there wearing our War Pension Committee hats I think it is important to pass on that positive moves are being undertaken to address some of the difficulties faced by ex-servicemen and women in prison. SSAFA and the Royal British Legion are the leading ex-service organisations on this.

5. Tony Burke I received a letter from Alan Burnham, Chief Executive VA, to say that Tony Burke the Director of Operations will be leaving the VA to take up a post in the National Health Service. I will write to Tony on the committee's behalf before he leaves his post on 3 June.

8. COMMITTEE MANAGER'S REPORT

VA Customer Focus Groups – scheduled for 14th September. The group will comprise of 10 War Pensioners/Widows, who should be nominated by the Chairman and WPC members – names to the Birmingham office. A member of the Welfare Service will be in attendance – Richard London from the Birmingham office.

Panel Cases – new procedure for cases referred to Norcross for a Statement of Case and WPC decisions. The cases will be monitored by Peter Hulme for quality and to ensure an effective and efficient service for WPCs.

Veterans Awareness Week – there will be 3 events taking place in London on the 10th July :

Service at Westminster Abbey – 1700 guests

Dinner at Buckingham Palace – 1850 guests

Memorial event at Horse Guards Parade – 10,000 guests

The VA will design, produce and deliver invitations for Westminster Abbey and Horse Guards Parade. There will be two 'mail-drops', the first incorporating the invitation and proforma which will check mobility details and personal verification. The second will include a covering letter, tickets, commemorative badge and information leaflet. A Helpdesk has been set up at Norcross to take all enquiries.

John Atherton had been contacted by a local War Pensioner, who is wheelchair bound. He requires car parking close to the

AP8 05/05
Members

Abbey and has explored many avenues to no avail. Following discussion, Harold Canning advised that he contact his local MP who may be able to help with car park access in the Houses of Parliament area.

New Appointments – following the General Election, the Prime Minister made the following new appointments:

Dr John Reid – Secretary of State for Defence

Andy Ingram will remain as Minister for the Armed Forces

Don Touhig – Under Secretary of State and Minister for Veterans.

Rates Leaflets - new leaflets now available.

State Pension Deferrals – for customers who delay claiming their State Pension.

Recent changes to rules which apply to customers who have deferred claiming the State Pension at State Pension age – information available if required.

Fred Davies asked if there had been any reaction since VA has become part of the MOD, as he felt that clients may not trust the VA if they had had problems with the MOD either during or post service. The Chairman reported that some of his clients at Combat Stress had commented on the lack of trust in the VA because of previous problems with the MoD.

9. GUEST SPEAKER

Erik Newman, Head of Communications at Norcross, gave a very informative presentation on his role within the Veterans Agency, and the ways in which he and his team, are working with other organisations to promote the Veterans issue. He outlined various ongoing initiatives and also the way in which the WPCs can help to promote awareness to the Veteran community. The Chairman, on behalf of the members, thanked Erik for his presentation and the information it contained.

10. REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS PANELS

There are no complaints panels outstanding. The previous reported case went to Appeal in January, and did not receive the decision from PAT until April – they upheld the original decision. An Entitlement appeal is ongoing.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Hospital Deductions – Derek Johnson wished to query at what 'stage' hospital deductions should take place. The Clerk had provided him with some information and was asked to distribute to all members.

Carnival – 02/07/05 at Northfield – Harold Canning informed members of an invitation to site an information stand at the

**AP9 05/05
Clerk**

Northfield Carnival at Victoria Park at no cost. Harold will attend with Ray Griffiths, Ken Fisher and Linda Stokes from the Birmingham office.

Royal Naval Association - are parading in Worcester on 24th October 2005 prior to a 3.00pm service at the Cathedral.

Regimental Badges – whilst attending the Badminton Horse Trials, Gary Kibblewhite looked in on the RBL stand where they were selling Regimental badges – RBL members on the Committee were not aware of this but thought it may be a new initiative.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – 23rd AUGUST 2005

The next meeting will be held at the Guildhall in Worcester, subject to confirmation from Gary Kibblewhite. The meeting will commence at 10.00am, with a proposed 11.30am closure, prior to the River Cruise.

There being no further business, Mike Burrows closed the meeting at 13.45p.m, thanking everyone for their participation.