

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES 12 July 2024

Minutes of the Trustee meeting held 1.30pm on 12 May 2024 online
via Teams and in person at the Victory Services Club; London

Name	Initials	Category of Trustee/Staff/Observer	Attendance
Trustees			
Hans Pung (Chair)	HP	Independent Trustee	Y
Wendy Cartwright	WC	Independent Trustee	Y
Victoria Wilson	VW	Independent Trustee	Y
Sue Davies	SD	Independent Trustee	Apologies
Frances Nash	FN	Independent Trustee	Virtual
Lieutenant General Sir Nick Pope	NP	Cobseo Trustee	Y
Major General James Senior	JS	MoD Trustee	Virtual
Zoe Bishop	ZB	MoD Trustee	Apologies
Captain Caroline Dix RN	CD	HMT Trustee	Y from item 2
Peter Kellam	PK	DA Trustee (Wales)	Virtual
John Mooney	JM	DA Trustee (Scotland)	Apologies
Vacancy		DA Trustee (Northern Ireland)	-
Collette Musgrave	CM	Family Federation Trustee	Virtual
Anisha Worbs	AW	OVA Trustee	Apologies
Others			
Matthew Seward	MS	In attendance to represent OVA	Y
James Greenrod	JG	Observer	Y
Dr Mark Mitchell	MM	Observer	Virtual
Anna Wright	AWr	Staff - CEO	Y
Carol Stone	CS	Staff – Director of Grants	Y
Sonia Howe	SH	Staff – Director of Policy & Communication	Y
Liz Rankin	LR	Staff – Director of Finance & Operations	Virtual
Sebastian Hare	Sha	Staff – Head of Finance	Virtual
Martin Dyson	MD	Staff – Head of Risk and Compliance	Y

Item No.	Item	Action
1	Meeting Opening (Annexes 1 & 2)	
1.1	The Chair opened the meeting and extended a welcome to those joining virtually and to JG and MS in person. Apologies were received and accepted from SD, ZB, JM and AW. The meeting was quorate in line with the Articles of Association.	
1.2	The Board approved the minutes of the last meeting of the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust held on 10 th May 2024 as a true and accurate record of the meeting.	

1.3	Review and receive update on actions arising The Board reviewed the current outstanding actions and updated the actions log. All other actions had been completed or were on the meeting agenda.	
1.4	Declarations of Interest: Confirmation of completion and return It was confirmed that all Declaration of Interests forms had been received and there were no conflicts to declare.	
1.5	Appointment of new Trustees It was confirmed that Zoe Bishop had signed the acceptance of the office of Trustee. The Board appointed ZB as an MoD Trustee.	
1.6	Trustee noted that the recent change of government may have implications on the Trust's relationship with the MOD. Remuneration and Nominations Committee would monitor.	
1.7	Trustees gave a vote of thanks in absentia to Rear Admiral Rex Cox for his long service with the Trust. RC's term of office ended at this meeting and the Board wished him well.	
2	Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust	
2.1	Feedback to address areas highlighted in Board self-assessment in May 2024 meeting JG explained the Ministerial and MoD oversight of the Trust: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A cover note was added to the annual report and accounts and is sent to the Minister as an annual update. • The three-year funding framework had been noted by the Minister. It would only be by exception if something needed Ministerial approval. • Under the new government the new Secretary of State for Defence was John Healey and Minister for Veterans was Al Carns. • The assumption was that the Office of Veterans Affairs (OVA) would be integrated into the MoD, but this needed to be finalised by the Prime Minister. • There were currently a lot of unknowns, an update would be given once information was available. 	
2.2	HP explained the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board monitored and reviewed the performance of the Executive; it was a continuous process; the Board saw the proposed programmes and signed them off; evaluation reports and feedback from projects was available if the Board requested to see them; annual report was reviewed and signed off by Board; and subcommittees oversaw and monitored Executive performance. The Chair set and reviewed the CEO performance objectives. • The division of responsibilities was laid out in the original governance documents. The Trust had just had a governance review and those documents would be revisited. • The delegated levels of authority were set out in the scheme of delegation for the Board which had been signed off in June 2023 and would be reviewed and approved at the September 2024 Board meeting. • How committees operated effectively: the Chairs of the committees reported to the Board after every meeting, they completed an annual self-assessment and Trustees were welcome to attend other committees as observers. 	
2.3	CEOs Report (Annex 3) AWr reported that the Trust had just launched the first programme in the three-year strategy, Serving Families: On the Move. There had been positive feedback to the social media launch.	
2.4	The Board noted that the December meeting was rescheduled to 13 December and an extra Board meeting had been scheduled for 21 March 2025. ACTION: AS to circulate meeting invitations.	AS
2.5	CD had joined the meeting and was welcomed.	

3	Governance and Finance	
3.1	The Chairs of the Committees were invited to report to Board.	
3.2	<p>Ethics Advisory Panel (EAP) (Met 11.07.24) FN reported that The Trust's complaints and raising concerns policies were reviewed and approved with amendments. It had previously been agreed that EAP could have a role in relation to research and impact activities in programmes with difficult or complex ethical issues. This meeting had outlined a way ahead for EAP to assist the team. The Terms of Reference (ToRs) were reviewed, and discussion took place on how to expand the remit of the panel usefully for the Trust and how to reflect in the ToRs the Trust's desire to be a good grant giver and the relating high level strategic issues. The name of the committee was discussed and would be revisited. ACTION: FN to meet with AWR about activities for horizon scanning. Thanks was given to SH, AS, Jo Brettel, Tom Traynor and MD.</p>	FN,AWr
3.3	<p>Grants Committee update (Met 18.06.24) The Chair, SD, was not in attendance to report; CS reported on behalf of the Committee. The ToRs had been reviewed with a new set of delegated programmes added. Grants of £1.3m had been awarded for the Service Pupil Support Programme, and a decision in principle was made to fund an additional programme for Argyle and Bute which had since been awarded.</p>	
3.4	<p>Remuneration and Nominations Committee update (Met 03.07.24) WC reported that pay review decisions had been made; Trustee succession planning had been discussed with the decision to start the recruitment process in September to replace WC; the ToRs had been reviewed and changes recommended for Board approval at the September meeting; and minor changes to policies and the staff handbook had been approved.</p>	
3.5	<p>Audit & Risk Committee update (Met 10.07.24) VW reported the internal audit opinion had been reported formally as a level 1, and the external auditor's outcome had no findings. The Committee had met with the auditors without the Executive present and they were full of praise for the team. A self-assessment review had taken place and a query around where health and safety sat was raised. ACTION: AS was reviewing where H&S should sit and what report was needed for assurance. The Chair thanked LR and the team for very extraordinary internal and external audits and asked they pass on the Board's thanks and appreciation; it was a huge credit to the finance function. ACTION: LR to pass on the Board's thanks and appreciation to the finance team.</p>	AS LR
4	Covenant Fund 2024-25 Programmes Development and Delivery (Annex 4)	
4.1	<p>CS reminded the Board that the context paper for this item had been introduced at the last Board meeting, with consideration given to the high-level design of the first 2024/25 tranche of programmes, this item presented the design for the remainder of the programmes. Consultation had taken place and the development of a framework for the programmes created at the awayday, these had then been developed, at pace, by staff. Some had already launched this week and others were being signed off by SMT all the time. Comments were invited.</p>	
4.2	<p>Discussion took place around the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the name of the programme data and evidence on suicide in the serving communities, but not within the veteran community flexibility in the programme design to cover a broad range of project ideas for the Board to decide regarding both prevention and interventions 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the focus on the LGBTQ+ community, as it was already a specific subsection that received attention, if the Trust defaulted towards an obvious outcome, then others may be missed it was recognised that the LGBTQ+ had nowhere to go within armed forces community support, so the expectation was for new bodies to be developed and to adapt current models of support it was an opportunity for the Trust to encourage organisations that were already supporting veterans to make their services available to those that weren't accessing them already there was funding left in the Solving Complex Problems programme to support any other areas identified there was a three-year programme design cycle, so if additional groups or demand was found there was flexibility and money within the programme a consultation had taken place to get an understanding of the issues, and this reflected that outcome. request for the question set to be framed to ensure other communities hadn't been excluded, so the board could be assured that the scope was being broadened evidence base in place to do something substantial and suggested picking up the cross-over with equality, diversity and inclusion issues for future funding the ethnic minority cohort was where the main disparity lay. 	
4.3	<p>The Board approved the following high-level programme designs with the caveat that under the 'supporting those who have been adversely affected by their service' objective, programmes were developed to address areas wider than the LGBTQ+ community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A programme awarding grants to improve facilities and locally based services for families who are accompanying their serving person on an overseas posting A programme to explore new ways of providing support from the UK to UK Armed Forces families living overseas A programme supporting acutely adversely affected veterans including the LGBTQ+ veterans' community A programme offering pilot grants for new approaches for WIS families and projects that give deeper insights into their needs. 	
4.4	<p>ACTION: Programmes to be developed to address areas wider than the LGBTQ+ community under the 'supporting those who have been adversely affected by their service' programme.</p>	Exec
5	Solicited Grants for decision (Annex 5)	
5.1	<p>MD presented the first decisions for solicited grants this year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solicited grant from The Company of Makers to extend a successful pilot programme to reach younger veterans through gaming. Solicited grant from Northumbria University to better understand the impacts of service life on children, looking beyond education and exploring wider determinants of wellbeing. 	
5.2	MD explained there was £450k available under strand C Understanding Complex Problems, this would leave just over £125k for future grants or to move elsewhere.	
5.3	Trustee noted the reference to ethical approval taking some time to achieve and asked who the approval was sought from. SH explained that Northumbria University would seek two layers of ethical of approval; one from its own ethics board, and the MoD Research and Ethics Committee, sought in parallel to reduce time.	
5.4	Trustee asked why the gaming project fell under the Understanding Complex	
5.5	<p>Problems pot.</p> <p>[.....]</p> <p>[Information has been withheld here in line with the requirements of section 43(2) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 – prejudice to commercial interests. A public authority is entitled to withhold information under this provision where disclosure of that information would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of any persons or organisations, including the AFCFT itself.]</p>	

5.6	<p>Observer asked if the Executive had approached a specific organisation, it was confirmed they had.</p> <p>Observer asked why these grants needed to be solicited and not open to all providers. HP explained that as ideas came from those groups, it was their intellectual property, the Trust recognised the potential and if it had gone out to tender, they would have won it. The Trust could be flexible for solicited activity and solicited grants were a small proportion of what the Trust supported.</p> <p>Observer raised concerns that certain organisations could conduct research to find problems that needed a solution which they could then ask for funding for. If Trustees saw that happening it would be flagged.</p>	
5.7	<p>[.....]</p> <p>[Information has been withheld here in line with the requirements of section 43(2) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 – prejudice to commercial interests. A public authority is entitled to withhold information under this provision where disclosure of that information would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of any persons or organisations, including the AFCFT itself.]</p>	
5.8	Trustee noted that imposing structure on something that was inherently dynamic was difficult to do, they raised concerns about ensuring the Trust remain relevant to a young and dynamic cohort.	
5.9	MS mentioned that other parts of the sector had been looking at e-sports to engage and as a fundraising tool but was mindful of any risks that involved embedded online gambling, there was no evidence of that in this project, but it was on their radar.	
5.10	The Board approved the awards to the two projects as solicited grants, with the caveat that monitoring oversight of the Company of Makers would be useful.	
6	Capital Grants (Annex 6 & 6a)	
6.1	SB presented the Major Capital grants programme for 2024-25, first round, second stage, and invited the Board to consider the two applications. Questions were invited.	
6.2	Trustee asked that given the grant programme was likely to be oversubscribed in this funding round, whether there was anything SB saw in the two applications that would suggest the Board may want to defer to future applications that may be of higher quality or if SB was happy with the quality of these applications. SB confirmed she was happy with the quality of the circulated applications, and explained there were a lot of measures in place to mitigate risk at the grant set up stage.	
6.3	<p>Following a Trustee query, it was clarified that one application was for a four-bed HMO for male veterans and the other was a two-bed apartment for female veterans.</p> <p>Trustee raised concerns over the large price difference between the two projects and the small number of veterans that would benefit in total from the housing.</p> <p>CS clarified that one project was asking for a smaller proportion of their project than the other.</p> <p>Trustee noted that the 6 units would not make a strategic difference to veteran housing but was adding to the programme incremental.</p>	
6.4	<p>SB described her visit to the RBLI, and the huge difference made by the refurbishment grant from the Trust. Costs had increased since Covid, and this was a drop in the ocean and part of much larger projects. The two-bed apartment for a mother and children was a significant stand out application.</p> <p>SH provided context on how the programme had developed, the work with OVA colleagues, the match funding requirements and industry contribution. The contribution of the project, as a whole, would impact over the next 20-40 years.</p>	
6.5	Trustee explained that it was not about providing housing but providing temporary solutions to enable veterans to move on, it was a short-term transition solution. Their experience was that the accommodation was of too good quality and people weren't leaving, this dilemma was being considered on the ground.	

6.6	Trustee queried the ownership of the architect drawings as they could be reused for future developments and be a value add from the Trust and programmatic learning. The use of employees from the veteran communities could also be added to the terms and conditions of grants.	
6.7	The Board approved both applications under the first round, second stage of the major capital grants programme for 2024/25.	
6.8	ACTION: The Board requested that the Executive consider value for money of future applications and the use of a loose unit cost concept.	Exec
7	Meeting close	
7.1	The dates of the next Board meetings were noted: 13 September 2024 25 October 2024 Strategy Day 13 December 2024 14 February 2025 21 March 2025 9 May 2025 12 September 2025 5 December 2025	
7.2	There being no further business, the Chair thanked the Trustees and the Executive for their time and for the comprehensive board pack and closed the meeting at 15:07.	
	Written resolutions Record of written resolutions approved out of meeting since the last meeting on 10 May 2024: OP FORTITUDE EXPANSION FUNDING A resolution was passed on 21 June 2024 to award a solicited grant of £39,339 to Riverside Group to employ 1 new FTE with appropriate housing experience to work in their Intervention Team. Brooke House VPPP Phase 1 assessment for decision A resolution was passed on 25 June 2024 to award a solicited grant of £134,850 to Brook House as the VPPP Portfolio Lead for Northern Ireland (having taken the place of NIVSO who had to withdraw).	