THE ARMED FORCES
COVENANT FUND TRUST

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
9 May 2025

Minutes of the Trustee meeting held 09.30am on 9 May 2025 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	In person
Wendy Cartwright	WC	Independent Trustee	In person
Victoria Wilson (Deputy Chair)	VW	Independent Trustee	In person
Frances Nash	FN	Independent Trustee	In person
Jonathan Bell	JB	Independent Trustee	In person
Lieutenant General Sir Nick Pope	NPo	Cobseo Trustee	In person
Major General James Senior	JS	MoD Trustee	Virtually until item 6.1
Zoe Bishop	ZB	MoD Trustee	Virtually
Captain Caroline Dix RN	CD	HMT Trustee	Apologies
Peter Kellam	PK	DA Trustee (Wales)	Virtually
Nick Parton	NPa	DA Trustee (Scotland)	Virtually
Lesley O'Rourke	LOR	DA Trustee (Northern Ireland)	Virtually
Sarah Clewes	CM	Family Federation Trustee	In person
Anisha Worbs	AWo	OVA Trustee	In person from item 2.2
Others			
James Greenrod	JG	Observer	In person
Maj. Mike Keighley	MK	Observer	Virtually
Anna Wright	AWr	Staff - CEO	In person
Carol Stone	CS	Staff – Director of Grants	In person
Liz Rankin	LR	Staff – Director of Finance & Operations	Virtually
Claire Rick	CR	Staff - Interim Director of Strategy	In person
Martin Dyson	MD	Staff - Head of Risk and Compliance	Virtually for part 1
Steven Inman	SI	Staff – Head of Strategic Grants and Relationships	In person for part 1
Lottie Ainsworth-Moore	LAM	Staff – Project Coordinator	In person for part 1
Alex Stainer	AS	Staff – Corporate Governance Manager and Minute taker	In person

Item No.	Item	Action
1 1.1	**Meeting Opening** **Welcome and Introductions** Apologies were accepted from CD. It was noted that AWo would be late arriving. The meeting was quorate in line with the Articles of Association. The Chair welcomed LOR and NP to the meeting.	
1.2	**Declarations of Interest** ZB, NPa and AWo gave verbal declarations in the meeting that they had no interests to declare for items on the agenda. Signed forms were requested. Declaration forms had been received from all other attendees.	

	It was noted that item 4.2 was a OVA programme, but as it was not a solicited bid and had followed the rigorous assessment process there was no conflict identified for AWo, and she could vote on the item. It was noted in item 4.2 that AWo had been appointed to the Invictus UK 2027 Board.	
1.3	**Approve minutes of the last Board meeting held on 21 March 2025** (Annex 1) The Board approved the minutes as a true and accurate record of the meeting.	
1.4	**Review and receive update on actions arising** (Annex 2) AWr ran through the actions log and gave an update.	
1.5	**Vote of thanks for outgoing DA Scotland Trustee John Mooney** The Chair took the opportunity to give a vote of thanks to John Mooney for holding the position of DA Trustee (Scotland) since 2022, and for being an active supporter of the Trust and helping the Trust engage across the sector. He noted the many highlights of JM's tenure.	
1.6	**Appointment of DA Trustees** It was confirmed that LOR and NPa had signed the acceptance of the office of Trustee and Member. **The Board appointed** Lesley O'Rourke as DA Trustee (Northern Ireland) for an initial term of 2-years. **The Board appointed** LOR as a member of the Grants Committee. **The Board appointed** Nicholas Parton as DA Trustee (Scotland) for an initial term of 2-years. **The Board appointed** NP to the Remuneration and Nominations Committee (People Committee)	
2 2.1	**Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust** **CEOs Report for noting** (Annex 3) AWr ran through the main points of the report and updated on the following: • The number of applications received for the public appointments process for Independent Trustees. The panel would be sifting over the next week to make a shortlist for Minister approval. • The latest development in the Trust's relationship with Invictus UK 2027, including drafting a memorandum of understanding for future grant making the Trust would be doing on their behalf and collaborative working to ensure the support Invictus provided was complementary to the programmes the Trust was running as it would be for the same group of beneficiaries.	
2.2	The Board requested a diagram of the relationship with Invictus UK 2027 and the flow of funds. [AWo joined the meeting]	AWr
3 3.1	**Governance, Finance and IT** **Grants Committee update** (meeting held 25.03.25) HP as acting Chair reported on behalf of the committee. The Board were reminded that they had delegated authority at the last meeting for HP to make decisions on behalf of the Trust at the meeting, and with the MoD representative of the Armed Forces Families Programme for those grants. The Covenant Fund grants had been awarded in accordance with the executive recommendations within the budget agreed at March board meeting.	
3.2	**Audit and Risk Committee update** (meeting held 23.04.25) VW reported on behalf of the committee the following: • the tender process for internal and external auditors had been discussed • reassuring report from the internal auditors was received on the capital grants programme to the point the award was made • the next piece of work would be looking at the process from implementation of the awards • report on HR processes around recruitment was discussed with some recommendations which were due to the size of the organisation. A balanced approach was being taken to address them.	

3.3	**Appointment of Ethics Advisory Panel members**: FN reported, as Chair of the panel, that recruitment had taken place and the following were recommended for appointment to the panel: • Kate King, Head, Academic Department of Military General Practice, Defence Medical Services • Michelle Alston – Chief Executive, Forces in Mind Trust **The Board appointed** KK and MA to the panel for an initial 2-year term.	
3.4	**Board self-assessment report** (Annex 4a) Trustees were invited to discuss the Board self-assessment report and suggest support/action that would enhance board effectiveness. The Board discussed and made the following points: • The report gave a positive picture, and the board performed well across all pillars, with all scores above 4 • There were some areas Trustees felt they couldn't assess; this may be because there were some relatively new Trustees who had not been through a full cycle. • Some committees would deal with some areas, for example the People Committee see more about the culture of the organisation as they discuss the results of the staff surveys. • An external review would take place every 3 years to give a sense of how other organisations operate. • Wrigleys undertook an external review of governance last year, so there would be another self-assessment next year (2026) followed by an external review the year after (2027). • The internal audit work, Wrigleys review and the self-assessment results, should be compared with data from stakeholders. • There were currently no red flags that raised any issues or suggested an external review should take place earlier than 2027. • Perception of the Trust from external stakeholders was suggested as part of the external review, including the sponsor body. • Questions about the effectiveness of the Board could be added to the next staff survey. It was noted that the Cabinet Office had commissioned reviews of all arm's length bodies, so the report would add value to the review of the Trust.	LR
3.5	**Grant assessment papers** AWr had sought advice from Wrigleys Solicitors regarding what they would expect to see in grant assessment papers for an organisation of the Trust's size and scope. Wrigleys had made suggestions which were discussed alongside the Executive response. Comparison to other responsible grant makers was discussed, with a large well-known organisation giving much larger grant packs to their decision-making panels. The current recruitment of Independent Trustees was intended to recruit a Chair of Grants Committee, who would bring their experience of good practice. It was queried whether the Board had the appropriate balance of decision making and information about the delivery of the grant and the effectiveness of the process. The use of evaluations would be discussed in item 6.	
3.6	**Documents for approval (**Annexes 6-8) Whistleblowing policy The policy had been reviewed and discussed at Audit and Risk committee and was recommended for Board approval. **The Board approved** the policy. Conflict of Interest policy **The Board approved** the policy and additional clarifications to the forms. Changes to Committee Terms of Reference **The Board approved** the change of name from Remuneration and Nomination Committee to People Committee, to better reflect the remit of the committee **The Board approved** the changes to the Audit and Risk Committee Terms of reference. **The Board approved** the additional sections in the Audit and Risk Committee ToRs referring to out of committee decisions be added to Grants Committee and People Committee ToRs.	

3.7	**Draft Annual Report for information** (Annex 9) The report was noted. Any comments to be directed to CR.	
4 4.1 4.1.1	**Grant programmes** **Covenant Fund decisions** **EoI for Empowering Bereaved Military Families** (Annex 10) MD presented the paper for Trustees to consider inviting three applicants to the Empowering Bereaved Military Families programme to submit a stage two (full) application. Applicant 8735 was in the process of changing their objects to cover military connected bereavement, this would mean they would also be eligible for consideration. The Board discussed the applicants making the following points: • 8735 were an advocacy charity and were about to change their CEO, an option may be to ask them to collaborate with one of the other organisations. • There seemed to be a singular pool, how separation would be created. • Organisations would be encouraged to looking at each other and bring each other into the portfolio. • There would be an element of cross-over with a delivery partner to oversee the portfolio and design, they would also work with statutory functions and the government to support the bereaved military cohort. • Applicants would be informed that being part of other bids would not exclude them. • Help applicants understand where their relative strengths and weaknesses were around their bids as it may help them partner with other organisations. • They needed to be aware that the three single services were different in how they gave their support. • They would need to provide input from early stages as that is when the experience of bereavement starts. **The Board approved** four applicants to submit a stage 2 application.	
4.1.2	**Covenant Fund 25/26 indicative budgets and programme development** (Annex 11) CS presented the paper for Trustees to agree changes to the indicative programme budgets for the Covenant Fund for 2025/26, and to approve the high-level programme design for the second year of two programmes: Apart Not Alone and Serving Families: On the Move. The Board discussed, making the following points: • Serving Families: On the Move – there was a drop off in demand for UK based families needing this, largely due to the abundance of information they could find by themselves and good provision at level 1 welfare. • Reflection was needed on what the fund was designed to achieve and what was provided by statutory services. • There was a lot of funding available for the submariner community, so much that it may be overwhelming and becoming unhelpful. • The USP or niche the Trust had and how the Board understood its place against statutory provision and a saturated marketplace. • Issues were around life for the families when a loved one goes away for a long time. • Other geographical areas to be targeted based on a map of need or other evidence. • Taking the government house building programme locations into account and joining up provision. **The Board approved** the proposed changes to the Covenant Fund 2025/26 programme budgets and the high-level programme design for the second year of two programmes.	
4.1.3	**Veterans' Mobility Fund – additional funding** (Annex 12) MD presented the paper for Trustees to consider directing the Executive to invite [………………….] to submit a solicited application for Veterans Mobility Fund continuation funding, up to £750k, and to consider reassigning up to £750k of Covenant Fund budget to support the delivery of the Veterans' Mobility Fund.	

	[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.] The Board discussed, making the following points: • Case studies had been received about how stress free and dignified the process was. • If this was a statutory services area and not a third sector area. • Additional funding provides time and space for enrichment of evaluation which may help others move forward. • The OVA could see demand but there were no evaluations, and they were not in a position to make a case for more money at this stage. • Start with unpausing current applications and then look at further demand. • Need for data and insight into what the equipment was being provided for and what conditions. • Statutory provision needed to be discussed, as there were reduced resources within the NHS everywhere. • With the covenant duty coming into law, there may be scope for it to be statutory provision in future. • Conversations needed to be had with the NHS in parallel as there may be future cross provision. **The Board approved** directing the Executive to invite […………………………..] to submit a solicited application for Veterans Mobility Fund continuation funding, up to £750k. [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.] **The Board approved** reassigning up to £750k of Covenant Fund budget to support the delivery of the Veterans' Mobility Fund.	
4.2	**OVA grant decisions** **Reducing Veteran Homelessness** (Annex 13) SI presented the paper inviting Trustees to make funding decisions on applications to the Reducing Veterans Homelessness programme (RVH), which was to be delivered with funding from the Office for Veterans Affairs (OVA) and would form the second iteration of the programme. **The Board approved** the portfolio of 10 applications. **The Board approved** the Enhanced grant to applicant 8707.	
4.3	**Thrive Together: update** LAM presented the update, which was noted.	
	Part 2 – Confidential papers – removed to part 2 minutes	
	Dates of the next Board meetings: 12 September 2025 24 October 2025 5 December 2025 13 February 2026 – Annual Trustees Meeting There being no further business the Chair closed the meeting at 13:42.	

Grants Awarded

Reducing Veteran Homelessness

Request ID	Name	Project Title	Project Location	Awarded
8715	Beyond the Battlefield	ENHANCE	Northern Ireland	£300,000
8723	Veteran Housing Scotland	Reducing Homelessness for Scottish Veterans	Scotland	£290,882
8701	Alabaré Christian Care and Support	Alabaré Homes for Veterans	Wales	£300,000
8714	Tom Harrison House	THH-Reducing Veteran Homelessness	England/North West	£300,000
8694	LiveWest	New Seasons Veterans Supported Housing	England/South West	£300,000
8711	Launchpad – Homeless Veterans' Charity	Specialist Support for Homeless Veterans	England/North West	£295,324
8706	The Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation	Stoll Foundation Veterans Supported Housing	England/London	£300,000
8707	The Riverside Group*	Riverside Ending Veteran Homelessness Together	England/North East	£348,975
8722	Wigan Council	Homes at Ease North West	England/North West	£296,057
8721	Royal British Legion Industries (RBLI)	Helping Homeless Veterans Move On	England/South East	£174,418
			Total awarded	**£2,905,656**

*total grant to Riverside Group includes the Enhanced award