

**WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**

**Report by Chief Officer – People and Technology**

**Council: 26<sup>th</sup> October 2022**

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**Subject: Armed Forces Covenant**

**1. Purpose**

- 1.1** To provide Council with a summary of the work being undertaken in support of the Armed Forces Covenant and future activity to maintain the Gold Award.

**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1** Council is asked to note the update.

**3. Background**

- 3.1** The Council last signed the Armed Forces Covenant in 2016 and was awarded the Armed Forces Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award in March 2019 after achieving the Bronze Award in February 2015 and the Silver Award in December 2015. This requires re-validation against set criteria every 5 years, the next being due in March 2024.
- 3.2** At the Council Meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2022, a Motion was proposed by Depute Provost John Millar for West Dunbartonshire Council to renew its' commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant, which is based on the premise that those who serve or have served, and their families deserve respect, support and fair treatment.
- 3.3** In response to this, Council agreed that a report, examining what more West Dunbartonshire Council could do to support our serving and veteran communities across the full range of services we provide and to strengthen partnerships with the Armed Forces Community, be remitted to a future Council meeting.
- 3.4** This report sets out a summary of the Gold Award Criteria; an overview of the work currently undertaken by Services in support of the award and covenant; and outlines further development work and supports being considered.

**4. Main Issues**

- 4.1** The Gold Award Criteria requires the Council to undertake the following:
- Signed the Armed Forces Covenant;
  - Has an existing relationship with their National Account Manager/appropriate defence representative;

- Is already demonstrating support by holding a valid Employer Recognition Scheme Silver Award ;
- Proactively demonstrate our forces-friendly credentials as part of our recruiting and selection processes. Where possible, be engaged with Career Transition Partnership in the recruitment of service leavers and be registered for the Forces Families Jobs portal;
- Actively ensure our workforce is aware of their positive policies towards defence people issues. For example, must have an internally publicised and positive human resources policy on Reserves;
- Be an exemplar within our market sector, advocating support to defence people issues to partner organisations, suppliers and customers with tangible positive results;
- Within the context of Reserves, must have demonstrated support to mobilisations or have a framework in place. Must provide at least 10 days' additional leave for training, fully paid, to the Reservist employee; and
- Not been the subject of any negative public relations or media activity.

- 4.2** Since achieving the Gold Award in 2019, the Council continues to meet the above criteria. With actions and supports progressed across the organisation in support of the Armed Forces and Reservists, these are monitored by People & Change, P&T Service and evidenced in the award submissions. Details of these actions and supports can be found in Appendix 1.
- 4.3** Key actions included People & Technology Officers attending the Gold Award Association and Highland Gold Network meetings therefore maintaining the established relationship with our National Account Manager. These meetings also allow for the sharing of ideas, information and best practice amongst the Gold Award community.
- 4.4** The Council displays the Armed Forces logo on the 'My Job Scotland' recruitment portal home page for West Dunbartonshire Council and is listed on the Career Transition Partnership and Forces Families Jobs websites to support and encourage the recruitment of Armed Forces reservists, veterans and their family members.
- 4.5** Key questions are asked at the point of recruitment as to whether an applicant is or will shortly be transitioning from the Armed Forces and, where the essential criteria of the post is met, they are guaranteed an interview.
- 4.6** The Council has a 'one stop shop' on its website containing information to support members of the Armed Forces, Reservists and their families in areas such as Housing, Education and Employment including flexible working for spouses or partners of those in the Armed Forces. The Council also has a Reservists Policy to support the mobilisation of reservists and provides 15 days paid special leave for training and development which is in excess of the standard requirement.
- 4.7** In order to advocate support to defence people issues to partner organisations, suppliers and customers, in 2017 the Chief Executive

contacted a number of the Council's most regular suppliers informing them that the council had signed the Armed Forces Covenant, explaining what it meant and encouraging them to also follow the Council's lead. The Council's procurement service confirmed that some of the suppliers employ Armed Forces veterans.

- 4.8** The Services across the council actively engage in a wide range of support mechanisms and events designed to promote the Armed Forces including:
- Support for Housing & Housing Benefit/ Council Tax Benefit;
  - Children and family supports;
  - Mental & Physical Health supports;
  - Education of the community;
  - Event Management in support of Armed Forces Day; and
  - Communication and Promotion of such activities and events both internal and external to the Council.

Detail of the above can be found in Appendix 1.

- 4.9** Whilst it is the aim to maintain the standards and momentum of these actions and initiatives to support the Armed Forces within our communities, Services have been asked to consider what additional actions and supports could be investigated and/or progressed. A summary of these is also contained in Appendix 1.

- 4.10** Prior to the re-submission for the Gold award in March 2024 and taking account of feedback from the further development work, the following areas will be considered:
- Establishing stronger links between service activities to be better informed and more joined up in delivery of supports and information;
  - Re-instatement of the Armed Forces support groups to further benefit our employees following the pandemic;
  - Recruitment and retention initiatives linked to the 'People First Strategy' to encourage employment of Armed Forces Reservists and Veterans alongside Protected Characteristics.
  - Further promotion of our employment policies, supports and services aligned to the Armed Forces;
  - Review how to incorporate feedback and/or lived experience of Armed Forces into the development work undertaken; and
  - Encouragement of other employers and/or suppliers to adopt support for the Armed Forces being an exemplar of a Gold Award holding organisation.

## **5. People Implications**

- 5.1** All employees are covered by the scope of the Council's employment policy and supports surrounding the Armed Forces and the future development work. The existing policies and practices also aim to support our wider communities in relation to the Armed Forces and their families.

## **6. Financial Implications**

**6.1** There are no financial implications associated with this report.

## **7. Risk Analysis**

**7.1** No risk assessment is required. However, failure to maintain the Gold Award status through lack of activity in this area would be detrimental to the Armed Forces personnel (serving or veteran) and may present reputational damage for the Council.

## **8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)**

**8.1** This report serves as an update to Council and therefore an EIA screening is not required. An EIA screening will be undertaken in relation to any new policy or support initiatives considered for implementation.

## **9. Consultation**

**9.1** Trade Unions will be involved through the appropriate forums in relation to the Gold Award and actions developed in support of our employees who are linked to Armed Forces and their families. They have received a copy of this report at the Convenor Meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2022.

**Victoria Rogers**

**Chief Officer - People and Technology**

**Date: 15<sup>th</sup> September 2022**

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<b>Appendices:</b>	Appendix 1 - Summary of Armed Forces & Reservist Support from Services
<b>Background Papers:</b>	None
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	None