

## Appendix 1

### **South Lanarkshire Armed Forces Covenant Duty Annual Report 2023**

#### **Foreword by Councillor Mark Horsham**

#### **South Lanarkshire Council's Armed Forces Champion**

As Veterans Spokesperson for South Lanarkshire Council, I would like to welcome this report coming to the full Council meeting.

Signing the Armed Forces Community Covenant in 2012 and re-signing it in 2018, we gave a commitment to our Armed Forces Community with the main mission statement:-

*“Ensuring that the Armed Forces Community face no disadvantage as a result of Service and that those who have given the most are given special consideration where appropriate.”*

This report highlights the progression that South Lanarkshire Council, our Lanarkshire Armed Forces Community and Veterans Covenant Group partners, and other organisations have been making to honour the pledge we made.

In addition, I would like to thank the officers within South Lanarkshire Council who work to plan and deliver initiatives that are put forward. I would like to especially thank Geraldine McCann, Lynne Wyllie and Maureen Greenwood for their support throughout the year in helping deliver our duty to the Armed Forces Covenant and the organisation of our Armed Forces Events.

Thanks should also go to our Lanarkshire Armed Forces Community and Veterans Covenant Group Partners who continue to deliver valuable services to our veterans, many made up of volunteers that give their time to support those that have given so much.

Also there have been numerous events that have been organised over the last year that displays our support for the Armed Forces Community, whether it be remembering and thanking those that have sacrificed and given so much. From the Festival of Remembrance, Freedom of South Lanarkshire to the Royal Regiment of Scotland and Remembrance Day. Instrumental to organising these events, along with South Lanarkshire Council, are The British Legion and Poppy Scotland.

As South Lanarkshire Council elected members and officers, we should be proud of what has been achieved but there is still a lot that can be done to ensure the Armed Forces Community face no disadvantage to service. This can only be achieved with partnership working with the many organisations and individuals that support our veterans, serving Armed Forces personnel and their families.

## Introduction

The 2023 annual report sets out a summary of the achievements and activities of the Council and its partners during the year to ensure that the Armed Forces Covenant is implemented, and our Armed Forces Community are not disadvantaged by their service.

## Education

The table below shows the number of children from the Armed Forces Community being educated in South Lanarkshire schools in 2023. The figures are drawn from two data capture dates February 2023 (black) and October 2023 (red)

Sector	Regular	Regular and Reserve	Regular and Veteran	Reserve	Reserve and Veteran	Veteran	Do not identify
Early Years	* 1	* 0	* 0	* 2	* 0	* 3	* 1
Primary	56 60	* 1	* 9	24 26	* 3	122 127	8 8
Secondary	18 19	* 1	* 3	8 13	* 2	61 69	* 1
Special	* 1	* 0	* 0	* 1	* 0	* 2	* 0
Totals	75 81	* 2	* 12	35 42	* 5	188 201	9 10

## Employment

South Lanarkshire Council offers a guaranteed interview to Veterans. This status is identified through screening questions.

The guaranteed interview approach is monitored within the Council at application, shortleat, interview and appointment stage.

In 2023 ,74 Veterans were interviewed for posts within the Council and 3 were appointed to posts.

The Council also provides special leave of up to 15 days with pay, subject to deduction of service pay, to members of the reserve forces.

The Council was awarded the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Silver Award in March 2023 for the second time. In achieving this award, the Council met the criteria for the award as it has demonstrated support for Defence, by employing at least one Reservist, actively communicating and upholding a positive stance to employees via established HR policies and procedures. Silver Award holders support Reservists by showing flexibility to allow them to plan for and fulfil their annual training and mobilisation requirements.

The Council is currently working towards the Gold Award.

### **Support for Veterans at Interview**

South Lanarkshire Council held an Awareness Session on 21 April 2023 with various guest speakers including:-

- ◆ Ex-Forces Employment Consultant (West Scotland), Forces Employment Charity
- ◆ Team Leader, Skills Development Scotland
- ◆ Armed Forces Champion for South West Scotland, Department for Work and Pensions
- ◆ Area Director for Scotland, RAF Benevolent Fund

During the session, the speakers and attendees mainly concentrated on recruitment and the Guaranteed Interview Scheme which ensured that candidates would not be disadvantaged in any way.

Following the awareness session, it was agreed that Skills Development Scotland would provide training for South Lanarkshire Council's HR staff for interviewing veterans.

### **Health and Social Care Partnership (H&SCP)**

**V1P (Veterans' First Point)** has provided a bespoke mental health support service for veterans (and their families where eligible) to assist the individuals in managing their service-related mental health issues. The service also benefits from a peer support worker network. The peer support workers will help everyone as necessary, linking them with suitable voluntary/support services in the community as well as ensuring the person gets to the necessary appointments and able to access any follow up treatment plans.

The H&SCP also works with the Defence Medical Welfare Service (MDWS) which aims to provide support to older veterans and their families. This can assist in the provision of equipment to assist in daily life; financial support to undertake house alterations; holidays/respite breaks and things to support the veterans in later life. They also undertook a specific exercise which seeks to improve the visibility of digital solutions in being able to support older people in their own homes.

The 'Armed Forces and Veterans' Champion' for NHS Lanarkshire assists in facilitating priority access to services where eligible to ensure that NHSL (and the H&SCP) is complying with the Armed Forces Covenant Duty. As well as specific access issues, this can also often involve working across services and different agencies such that the individual – and/or their families – receive a 'joined-up' approach to service delivery.

NHSL is also a recipient of the Gold Award for supporting Armed Forces personnel and Veterans in the workplace. As well as supporting former services personnel into employment, this also provides dedicated Terms and Conditions for those in the 'Reserves.'

## **Housing**

Allocations policy for social housing • Homelessness •

### **Housing Allocation Policy**

Since August 2010, South Lanarkshire Council's Housing Allocation Policy has given members of the Armed Forces who meet certain criteria the highest priority for housing, along with homeless applicants and those with an urgent medical need. A key aim of the Council's approach being to prevent homelessness.

The Housing Allocation Policy was reviewed in 2019 and, as part of the consultation process, the draft policy was issued to a number of Armed Forces charities and support organisations, including Haig Housing, Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Families Association (SAFFA) and The Armed Services Advice Project (ASAP), for their views and comments, to help shape the finalised policy and ensure that it best served the local Armed Forces and veterans' community.

The Housing Allocation Policy awards 'Urgent Forces' priority to HM Forces personnel who have completed a minimum of three years' service or have been injured in combat or discharged on medical grounds and who meet one of the following requirements:

- ◆ the applicant must have lived in South Lanarkshire prior to the start of service; or
- ◆ the applicant's partner must live in South Lanarkshire or previously lived here immediately before the start of service, or marriage/relationship; or
- ◆ the applicant's parents or kinship care are permanently resident in South Lanarkshire; or
- ◆ the applicant has an offer of full-time employment in South Lanarkshire.

Urgent Forces priority can be awarded up to six months before date of discharge and up to six months following the date of discharge and are queued on the Urgent Housing Need list, where applicants with the highest priority for housing are queued.

The approach taken in South Lanarkshire has been recognised as an example of good practice within the Scottish Government's Social Housing Allocation in Scotland, practice guide.

### **Housing Options and Housing Support**

Housing and Technical Resources provide advice and assistance to veterans and current members of the Armed Forces through the Home Options service which provides access to information and advice on a range of housing and related options. This information ensures that there is help and support for veterans to make informed choices about their housing options.

When an application for housing is received from a veteran or current member of the Armed Forces, Housing Officers will work with them to understand their needs and provide information and advice on housing options suitable to their circumstances.

Housing Support can be provided to veterans or members of the Armed Forces who may need help to prepare for, or manage and sustain their tenancy, by assisting them with developing the skills and confidence for moving into and managing a new home.

Where appropriate, referrals may also be made to specialist support services such as Scottish Veterans Housing Association, SAFFA, ASAP as well as Citizens Advice and NHS services etc.

### **Performance Information – List and Lets**

The table below sets out the number of applications assessed as having Urgent Forces priority (as at the end of each financial year) and the number of lets made to applicants between 2019/20 and 2023/24 (to date). The table also highlights the average number of days taken to provide housing, from date of application to the tenancy start date.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Urgent Forces New Applications Received</b>	<b>South Lanarkshire Council Lets to Urgent Forces List</b>	<b>Ave Days to House (Date of Award to Date of Entry)</b>
<b>2019-20</b>	4	3	99
<b>2020-21</b>	2	3	60
<b>2021-22</b>	0	1	6
<b>2022-23</b>	5	3	66
<b>2023-24(YTD) 5th Oct</b>	3	3	59

In relation to aids and adaptations, only one required a shower/wet floor installed following the allocation of the property.

### **National support and advice**

The Scottish Government has a dedicated area on its website for veterans and has also published a document for Veterans called 'Scottish Housing guide for people leaving the Armed Forces and ex-service personnel' which is also referenced on the South Lanarkshire Council website.

South Lanarkshire has been recognised as a good practice case study for veterans on the Scottish Government website for prioritising veterans within its Allocation Policy. In addition, the Scottish Government has also acknowledged South Lanarkshire's Housing Allocation Policy within the document which accompanies the third annual update to the Scottish Parliament in 2019 on the support for our veterans and the Armed Forces community in Scotland.

## **Peer Review - Other local authority approaches to allocating housing to veterans**

Earlier this year, a peer review was undertaken to consider the approach taken by six other local authorities in respect of the management and prioritisation of applications for housing from veterans, as detailed within respective Housing Allocations Policies.

Analysis of the information provided, confirmed that South Lanarkshire Council provides a higher level of priority for housing to Armed Forces personnel than other similarly sized local authority landlords.

## **Customer Engagement**

We recognise that the best way to ensure that customers are involved in shaping our housing services is to work in partnership and build on existing relationships. This approach is also in line with the council values outlined in Connect 2022-2027:

- ◆ focused on people and their needs.
- ◆ working with and respecting others
- ◆ accountable, effective, efficient, and transparent
- ◆ ambitious, self-aware, and improving
- ◆ fair, open, and sustainable

Most recently, Military Matters, part of Housing Options Scotland, contributed to the development of the Local Housing Strategy 2022-27 and, more recently, we have contacted a number of armed forces and veterans' organisations to help inform our Customer Involvement Strategy 2024-29.

This is the fifth strategy prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. This strategy aims to build upon the achievements of our previous Customer Involvement Strategy and sets out our continued commitment to engaging and involving customers in shaping housing services.

## **Armed Forces Day**

The Armed Forces Day 2023 was incorporated into the Freedom of South Lanarkshire event below. We raised the Armed Forces Day flag during the service conducted by Rev. Blackman. Stalls representing all of the services and veterans' charities were present on the day outside the building.

## **Freedom of South Lanarkshire Awarded to the Royal Regiment of Scotland**

The Freedom of South Lanarkshire was granted for the first time to the Royal Regiment of Scotland (SCOTS) on Armed Forces Day 2023.

At an historic event, the Royal Regiment paraded around the streets of Hamilton and Provost Margaret Cooper handed over a special scroll containing the Freedom of South Lanarkshire document to Major General James Roddis.

A number of other gifts were also handed over to the Royal Regiment to mark the occasion.

Provost Cooper said:

“The whole day was a fantastic, colourful occasion and I would like to thank the Royal Regiment for putting on such a marvellous display. I was filled with an immense sense of pride as they marched with their bayonets fixed, drums beating and pipes playing.

We also had a fantastic turnout, so thank you to the people of South Lanarkshire who came along to witness the historic occasion.

I would like to thank our veterans, who looked wonderful as usual, as well as the cadets who also added to the sense of occasion.

I am delighted that the Royal Regiment are the first to receive the honour of the Freedom of South Lanarkshire.”

Major General Roddis said:

“It was an honour and a privilege for The Royal Regiment of Scotland to be the first recipients of the Freedom of South Lanarkshire.

It was a special day for the people of this vibrant community and for our soldiers and will only further the strong links we already enjoy.

We are immensely grateful to the Provost and her team for enabling this unique occasion.

Soldiers exist to serve their people and for our work, in peace and in war, to be recognised is truly humbling and a great source of strength and pride to us all.”

### **Poppy Scotland**

The Poppy Big Band Tour took place in the Memorial Hall, Lanark on 15 September. The Provost hosted a small Civic Reception before the event where local Councillors and VIPs from Poppy Scotland were present. Tickets were sold for the event through the Memorial Hall. The Council paid for the hire of the venue. Poppy Scotland paid for the band meals etc.

### **Festival of Remembrance**

The Festival of Remembrance was held in the Townhouse on 4 November. This event was organised through the British Legion. Local schools (Hamilton area) performed a set each and the event finished with the Remembrance Service. The event was attended by the Provost and Lord Lieutenant.

### **Armistice Day**

#### **Remembering the fallen ahead of Armistice Day**

Those who made the ultimate sacrifice were remembered ahead of Armistice Day. A service took place at the Victoria Cross Memorial in Hamilton. Wreaths were laid in commemoration and a two-minute silence observed following the Last Post.

Depute Provost Bert Thomson and Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Lanarkshire Louis Munn joined Rev Ross Blackman of Hamilton Old Parish Church, Reverend Joanne Hood of St John's Parish Church, and military veterans for the service.

Pupils from Hamilton College, councillors, council officials and members of the public also attended the service.

Depute Provost Thomson said:

"I was honoured to take part in today's service.

It is always very poignant to reflect in a moment of silence to remember the sacrifice made by those fighting to protect the freedoms we enjoy today.

Remembering their sacrifices not only honours them but reminds us that we all have a part to play to ensure that their deaths were not in vain.

We remember them, and we never forget."

The council's Veterans' Champion, Councillor Mark Horsham, said:

"The service today was very moving and allows us to honour those who gave their lives in conflict.

We thank all who have served and all who currently do so – those who understand more than we ever can."

The Victoria Cross memorial commemorates the residents of Hamilton who were awarded the Victoria Cross in the First World War and the Second World War.

A number of services were scheduled to take place across South Lanarkshire on Remembrance Sunday (12 November) to remember the fallen.

## **Remembrance Day**

### **Remembering the fallen and their legacy**

Remembrance Sunday services took place across South Lanarkshire, including at the Cenotaph in Hamilton.

Among those in attendance at Bothwell Park were Provost Margaret Cooper and Lord Lieutenant of Lanarkshire, Lady Susan Haughey.

They were joined by Reverend Ross Blackman of Hamilton Old Parish Church, Reverend Joanne Hood of St John's Parish Church, military veterans, pupils from local schools, councillors, council officials and members of the public.

Services also took place at the War Memorials in East Kilbride and Larkhall.



Provost Cooper said:

“I was honoured as Provost to take part in Sunday’s service.

It is always very poignant, and we remember the sacrifice made by those fighting to protect the freedoms we enjoy today.

Remembering their sacrifices not only honours them but reminds us that we all have a part to play to ensure that their deaths were not in vain.

We remember them, and we never forget.”

### **Lanarkshire Firmbase**

Lanarkshire Firmbase, which is jointly chaired by the Armed Forces and Veterans Champions of both North and South Lanarkshire, met three times during 2023. Membership of the group also includes Legal, Personnel, Housing, Education and Corporate Communications representatives of both councils together with representatives of the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund, Forces Employment Charity, Armed Services Advice Project (ASAP), Skills Development Scotland, BLESMA, Defence Medical Welfare Service (DMWS), REMPLOY, Office of the Lieutenancy, Veterans Scotland, the Veterans Champion, NHS Lanarkshire, CPT, Veterans Welfare Service, Who Dares Cares, Project Nova, DWP, Lowlands Reserve Forces and Cadets Assoc, Veterans 1<sup>st</sup> Point, MOD, C Company (6 SCOTS), Fares4Free and Alcoholics Anonymous.

Matters considered by the Group included

- ◆ **Decade of the Covenant Review** undertaken by the First in Mind Trust (FiMT) focussing on the delivery and impact of ten years of the Armed Forces. The publication of the report, 11 years after the introduction of the Covenant, coincided with the introduction of a legal duty on councils, the NHS, and schools to “have due regard” to the Covenant in relation to healthcare, education, and housing. An awareness session for local authority champions had taken place with discussions focussing on the toolkit and role descriptions.
- ◆ **Employment for Veterans Transitioning from Services** - The Forces Employment Charity arranged an event in the West of Scotland to encourage veterans and early service leavers to attend. Veterans can be registered with the Charity from seven months post discharge, and anyone can register for employment support. The charity supports veterans and spouses with the view that this be extended to looking at supporting dependence in relation to courses, training, CVs, and events in respect of employment relations.
- ◆ **REMPLOY – Open Day**  
REMPLOY advised that to support employability, they were in the process of arranging an open day each month to be held in Quarry Street, Hamilton and that would allow groups of individuals to meet in a relaxed environment. A Jobs Fayre had also been arranged to take place on 22 March and would include a multitude of sectors from care, retail, and hospitality.

- ◆ **Lanarkshire Firm Base – Proposed Change of Name**
  - ◆ **Arrangements for Armed Forces Day**
  - ◆ **Terms of Reference for the renamed** Lanarkshire Armed Forces Community and Veterans Covenant Group (formerly Lanarkshire Firmbase) will be reviewed in 2024.
  - ◆ **Royal Regiment of Scotland -Freedom of North Lanarkshire which would be held on 29 June 2024.**
  - ◆ **Veteran Friendly GP Processes-** Veterans Champion, NHS Lanarkshire advised of the current support and mechanisms in place when a Veteran makes themselves known to their GP, that they have faster access to secondary care via the referral management system, and whilst there are increasing issues to general practice, veterans do get priority and better access, and that there were no outstanding issues.
  - ◆ **The Upskilling Veterans Project-** work currently being undertaken to support veterans.
  - ◆ **Veterans Mentoring Service (Sacro) -** advised of the support being provided for veterans at risk of being involved in the criminal justice system, and that discussions were ongoing with Barlinnie prison with a view to settling up coffee mornings and assistance to assist veterans reintegrate with society and access support available such as benefits and exploring employment opportunities.
  - ◆ **Armed Forces Covenant Duty-Statutory Guidance**  
The Covenant had now been enshrined in law and there was now a statutory duty to give due regard to the Covenant in certain services. The new guidance published by the Ministry of Defence in November 2022, was very helpful in giving advice, with detailed interpretation and good examples of the Duty.
  - ◆ **Support for Veterans at Interviews -** South Lanarkshire Council held an Awareness Session on 21 April 2023 with various guest speakers including:-
    - ◆ Ex-Forces Employment Consultant (West Scotland), Forces Employment Charity
    - ◆ Team Leader, Skills Development Scotland
    - ◆ Armed Forces Champion for South West Scotland, Department for Work and Pensions
    - ◆ Area Director for Scotland, RAF Benevolent Fund

During the session, the speakers and attendees concentrated on recruitment and the Guaranteed Interview Scheme which ensured that candidates would not be disadvantaged in anyway.

Following the awareness session, it was agreed that Skills Development Scotland would provide training for South Lanarkshire Council's HR staff for interviewing veterans.

- ◆ **Scottish Veterans Commissioner** outlined her 3-year strategic plan for 2023 to 2025 which included its mission and mandate, vision and values, and offered an outline of the work that would be pursued during her 3-year appointment as Scottish Veterans Commissioner. It would set a path and priorities, as well as the next steps and approach the Commissioner would be taking. Some of this work may be more long term and would continue beyond the end of Commissioner's tenure and then this would be a decision for her successor.
- ◆ **RBLI Lifeworks-** Royal British Legion Industries (RBLI) gave a presentation on the work of RBLI