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**Report To:** Health & Social Care Committee      **Date:** 11<sup>th</sup> January 2018

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**Subject:** Veterans Support Advisor Role

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## 1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an update on the co-ordination of the support in place for ex-Armed Forces personnel and their families and access to services.

## 2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Council signed the Armed Forces Covenant in March 2012 and by doing so made a commitment to support current and former members of the Armed Forces and their families, and sets out how they should expect to be treated. The HSCP has lead responsibility to co-ordinate this support and ensure appropriate access to services.
- 2.2 In response to this and working in partnership with Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire Councils, a Veterans Support Advisor (VSA) was recruited in 2014 to coordinate delivery of a service across the 3 councils. The VSA post is temporarily funded until March 2019.
- 2.3 Since the appointment of the VSA, support for the Armed Forces community has grown. The Customer Service Centre has an access point specifically for the armed forces community and is supported by a bespoke electronic referral and reporting system. The establishment of a Veterans Support Operational Group has raised awareness within service areas of the challenges faced by this community and the opportunities available to support them. It is chaired by the Elected Member who is the Council's Armed Forces Champion and has multi-agency representation.
- 2.4 In October 2017, Inverclyde Council was named as one of 33 employers in the United Kingdom (and only 3 in Scotland) to achieve the Ministry of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Status.

## 3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That the Committee notes the support in place for Armed Forces Veterans, service personnel, reservists and their families
- 3.2 That the Committee notes the role played by the Veterans Support Officer, who with a depth of knowledge and experience, applies expertise and focuses the needs of the armed forces community, supported by the Veterans Support Operational Group.
- 3.3 That the Committee otherwise notes the contents of the report.

**Louise Long**  
**Corporate Director (Chief Officer)**  
**Inverclyde HSCP**

## 4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The Council signed the Armed Forces Covenant on 22nd March 2012 which is a commitment to support current and former members of the Armed Forces and their families, and sets out how they should expect to be treated. The HSCP has lead responsibility to co-ordinate this support and to ensure appropriate access to services.
- 4.2 In response to this and working in partnership with Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire councils, a Veterans Support Advisor (VSA) was recruited in 2014 to coordinate delivery of a service across the 3 councils. The VSA's role is to improve access to council services for the armed forces community and to be the focal point to work on behalf of the 3 councils, strengthening the partnership and being responsible for coordinating the delivery of the project's outcomes, and where possible sharing resources, expertise and minimising duplication. This approach has been recognised at a national level and featured as best practice in a Scottish Veterans Commissioner report.
- 4.3 The VSA has 22 years armed forces service, which has proved to be crucial by bringing a depth of knowledge of the armed forces community and experience to the councils to support their efforts to ensuring the Armed Forces Covenant commitments are met. She splits her time equally between the 3 councils.
- 4.4 The delivery of the service in Inverclyde has been facilitated by the establishment of a Veterans Support Operational Group (VSOG). The group is coordinated by the Benefits Team Leader and comprises representation from services across the council/ HSCP with relevant external partners such as Inverclyde Housing Association Forum (IHAF) and The Trust. Members are the nominated point of contact within their service area to take responsibility for referrals from the Customer Service Centre and to work directly with the VSA. The group receives updates about third sector funding and specialist service provision and they share news and best practice about activity within services across Inverclyde and the neighbouring council areas.
- 4.5 The armed forces Customer Service Access Point was relaunched in March 2017. The service aims to encourage the Service community to make themselves known to Customer Service representatives who will assess their needs and refer them directly using a bespoke electronic referral system to the single points of contact within the VSOG. Customers can choose to have their Customer Service record annotated with a flag recording that they have served.
- 4.6 Enquiries range from straightforward queries that can be handled simply by signposting customers to a relevant service to more complex situations requiring a range of provision. The Customer Services system is able to report the number of enquiries and referrals that come through the Contact Centre which allows analysis of the demand for services and support.
- 4.7 In total, 230 members of the Armed Forces community were supported between August 2014 and October 2017. The VSA has assisted service users by working with a range of council services, Advice First, Jobcentre Plus, housing providers, the Ministry of Defence Veterans Welfare Service in relation to compensation and pension claims and with the third sector. Charities that have helped service users include Legion Scotland, SSAFA, Combat Stress, Poppy Scotland, Scottish War Blinded, British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association and Armed Forces Associations. The VSA is able to keep up to date with local support provision, specialist government and charity funding, and has developed close links with SSAFA, the "gatekeeper" for veterans' charities.
- 4.8 In addition to the role with the VSOG, the VSA raises awareness of the challenges faced by the armed forces community and the opportunities available to support them by meeting with services across the council, the third sector, Jobcentre Plus and the voluntary sector. The talks cover Inverclyde Council's commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant and specific support and charity funding.
- 4.9 Since the appointment of the VSA, support for the Armed Forces Community has grown and since the establishment of the VSOG, awareness of the challenges faced by this community and the opportunities available to support them are becoming embedded in service areas.

- 4.10 Inverclyde Council achieved the Silver award of the Ministry of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme in 2016 and in October 2017, Inverclyde Council was named as one of 33 employers in the United Kingdom to achieve Gold Status, and one of three employers in Scotland. The 3 council partnership project was awarded runner up in the Best Health and Wellbeing category at the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) awards in 2016.
- 4.11 The Veterans Support Advisor has attended a number of events on behalf of Inverclyde Council including Veterans workshops, Armed Forces and Remembrance parades. She has led discussion groups and attended the Scottish Parliament. All of this activity can be seen as cementing Inverclyde's reputation as an area that supports its Veterans and actively encourages them to live and work in this area.
- 4.12 The next steps for VSOG members are to explore opportunities to bid for funding for projects to support the armed forces community. The VSA will assist services by using her armed forces expertise and knowledge of the application process to enhance bids originating from service areas.

## 5.0 PROPOSALS

- 5.1 That the activity of the Veterans Support Advisor and the contribution made to the Council's commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant be noted.

## 6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 **Finance**  
Financial Implications:

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report £000	Virement From	Other Comments

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact £000	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
N/A					

### Legal

- 6.2 No implications

### Human Resources

- 6.3 Activity is contained within services

### Equalities

6.4 Has an Equality Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES (see attached appendix)
X	NO - This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy. Therefore, no Equality Impact Assessment is required.

### **Repopulation**

6.5 Continuing to support the armed forces community will have a positive impact on the repopulation of the area.

### **7.0 CONSULTATIONS**

7.1 None.

### **8.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

8.1 None