



**FIFE COUNCIL**

# **Armed Forces & Veterans Community Champion 1st Annual Report**





## Introduction

Welcome to the first ever Annual Report produced by Fife Council's Armed Forces & Veterans Community Champion (AF&VCC) in respect of the Council's commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant. The Armed Forces Covenant is a pledge that together we acknowledge and understand that those who serve or who have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, should be treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy and society they serve with their lives.

I am Councillor Rod Cavanagh and had the honour of being appointed as Fife Council's Armed Forces & Veterans Community Champion in June of 2017. I will advocate on the issues facing our veterans community in Fife and aim to be a catalyst for change by ensuring all Council departments are aware of their responsibilities in support of the Armed Forces Covenant and, by liaising with the various Military Charities, Associations and statutory agencies that support them.

The role of the AF&VCC is relatively new for the Council and as such has evolved over the previous 4 years and continues to evolve as we develop policies and practices that support and encourage veterans and their families in the community.

Historically Fife has had a long and proud association with the military with the Royal Navy base in Rosyth and firstly the Royal Air Force and now the Army based at Leuchars. It is estimated from research carried out on behalf of Veterans Scotland that there are around 18,000 Veterans resident in Fife, in addition there are 11,000 spouses and 5,500 children.



*Susan Budd (right) Community Support Officer, Yvonne Griffiths (centre) WRVS, Valerie Kilpatrick (left) Veterans Welfare Service Cllr. Rod Cavanagh (far left) and personnel at Leuchars Army Base.*

Of those personnel leaving the Forces annually, 90 return to Fife.

I have been greatly encouraged by the level of commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant by Fife Council over recent years. In recognition of this and the substantive policies that the Council have developed, the Council was awarded the MOD's Silver Award under the Defence Employers Recognition Scheme (DERS) in 2016 and which is held to the present day.

This Annual Report will also cover many of the achievements of the previous 4 years.

# The Role

The role of the AF&VCC has never formally been defined. In recent months work was done to encapsulate all that would fall within the remit and work in this respect is ongoing.

In broad terms the role includes Advocacy on behalf of the Armed Forces Community, to raise their profile and to ensure, where appropriate, that the interests of the Armed Forces Community within Fife are properly considered and responded to. This includes engagement with the Council's Civic Office in relation to ceremonial events, an ambassadorial role, liaising with other kindred organisations and establishing positive working relationships with local military commanders and other AF Champions (e.g. NHS, Police, DWP).

Inevitably, this level of commitment has impacted substantially on workload and responsibility and to continue to provide this level of service, serious consideration will have to be given to such fundamentals as clerical support and to bringing the role within the scope of the Enhanced Responsibility Allowance scheme.

# Engagement

I represent Fife Council on a number of external committees including the Scottish Governments Armed Forces & Veterans Health: Strategic Oversight Group, the Fife Community Covenant Partnership at Leuchars Army Base and, the Highland Reserve Forces & Cadets Association who's HQ is in Dundee.



*Beacon made by apprentices from Fife College in collaboration with Babcock International, Rosyth and children's choir from Donibristle & Dalgety Bay Primary School.*



*Wendy Watson Chief Operations Officer, Fife Sports & Leisure Trust and Cllr. Rod Cavanagh at the Michael Woods Centre, Glenrothes.*



*Armistice Day parade in Rosyth by members of Rosyth & West Fife Royal Naval Association.*



*Keith Brown MSP, Dr Sharon Doherty V1P, Nicky Connor  
Executive Director of Fife Health & Social Care Partnership, Cllr.  
Rosemary Liewald and Cllr. Rod Cavanagh.*

The ever expanding network of significant contacts has also necessitated travel throughout Fife and beyond extending as far afield as Arbroath, Perth, Dundee and Edinburgh.

There are throughout the UK over 2,500 military charities and while this number may appear impressive, research has revealed that veterans experience great confusion in determining which charity to approach for support or help.

My experience in Fife to date is that there are fourteen organisations that I interact with on a regular basis and who provide the most effective responses including SSAFA (Fife), Fife Community Covenant Partnership (FCCP - Leuchars Army Base), the Armed Services Advice Project (ASAP) and Veterans 1st Point (V1P).

In 2018 I was contacted by the Rosyth & West Fife Branch of the Royal Naval Association who were planning to participate in the UK wide 'Beacons of light' project to commemorate the end of World War 1. I assisted in supporting their successful bid for funding from the Covenant Fund to finance the project which ultimately involved apprentices from Rosyth Dockyard in the construction of the Beacon and, pupils from Primary Schools in Rosyth and Dalgety Bay who recited poems from World War 1 at the commemoration.

Also in 2018, following discussion with V1P around the benefits to mental wellbeing from engaging in physical exercise, I negotiated a 30% discount for Veterans resident in Fife on charges at all Fife Sports and Leisure facilities.

At that time V1P were based in a room at the Cardenden Health Centre and were in the process of looking for more suitable accommodation.

In 2019, the then disused library in Lochore was identified as an ideal building. Following discussion between Fife Council and NHS Fife, the building was secured and I was part of the committee that was formed to oversee plans drawn up for the complete refurbishment to create a 'state of the art' facility. Notwithstanding the constraints of the Covid pandemic, the project was completed in early 2021 and the building, named ' Rosewell Centre', was opened by Keith Brown MSP Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2021.

Rosewell Centre is now a dedicated Mental Health & Wellbeing Centre for veterans providing a psychosocial support programme delivered by veteran peer support workers aimed at addressing the wider determinants of veteran wellbeing - including employment, financial stability, social connection and activity, as well as through the provision of psychological therapy for those who need this.



*Birthday celebration and farewell salute to Fife's oldest veteran, Jimmy Sinclair.*

On the 28 May 2020, sadly we had to say goodbye to Fife's and probably Scotland's oldest veteran, Jimmy Sinclair. Jimmy reached the grand old age of 107 and died peacefully at his home in Kirkcaldy. He served as a gunner in the Royal Horse Artillery in WW2 and fought in many of the campaigns in North Africa and Europe finally arriving in Berlin. Jimmy had many stories to tell and fortunately we were able to celebrate his last birthday together and we laughed when he told us that he was still wearing had the same set of false teeth that were supplied to him by the 4<sup>th</sup> Australian Field Ambulance in Tobruk.

Breakfast Clubs are also an important feature of daily life for veterans, they are essentially informal gatherings providing that all important social contact and camaraderie that was lost when leaving the Forces. They also serve as a forum for discussion on accessing relevant services.

In Fife there are currently breakfast clubs in Lochore, Pitreavie in Dunfermline and at Leuchars Army Base. I was part of the committee that established the Leuchars breakfast club which is unique in that it welcomes serving personnel as well as veterans who are able to exchange 'war stories' and catch up on latest developments. I also had the privilege along with a Provost Jim Leishman of being invited to open the breakfast club at Pitreavie Business Park.

The Covid 19 pandemic has severely curtailed regular meetings of the Breakfast Clubs over the last two years and veterans have had to maintain contact via social media and phone calls. Fortunately, with the recent easing of restrictions this activity has been able to resume.



*Veterans enjoying the 'banter' at Lochore breakfast club.*

# Housing

The Fife Housing Register (FHR) Partners recognise the specific commitment that individuals and their households make when serving in the armed forces and have set out a policy and operational framework for responding to the housing needs of people leaving armed forces accommodation. This is encapsulated within a specific Armed Forces Protocol.

This will ensure that those leaving the armed forces have access to appropriate information and advice, Fife Council (as the strategic housing authority) will take a lead in providing relevant housing information to the lead representative bodies through effective liaison arrangements with SSAFA.

Applications from those leaving the armed forces will be assessed within the Fife Housing Register's Common Assessment of Need (CAoN). The CAoN makes provision for those being discharged from military service within specific and nonspecific features of the application assessment and pointing framework. On receiving a copy of the discharge papers they will receive 75 points. These points will be applied at the point of receipt and will last indefinitely, irrespective of any change in the applicant's circumstances/address. These points will remain until permanent accommodation has been secured by the Fife Housing Register, by nomination to another landlord or advised by the applicant that they have secure accommodation.

Fife Council has made a specific Covenant Commitment to provide up to 40 Housing allocations per year to veterans although are experiencing some difficulty due to limited demand on the housing access system.

Over the past 5 years 44 veterans and their families have been housed by Fife Council and their partners.

# Human Resources

Recognising the value that veterans bring to the workplace, further work is also being undertaken by the Council's Human Resources department to welcome veteran job applicants and to develop systems that will support Reservists and Cadet Force Adult Volunteers (CAVs) currently within the workforce.

As previously stated, the Council have been the holders of the silver award under the DERS scheme and preparations are well advanced for the submission of a bid for the gold award in March 2022.

Along with HR staff, I have given presentations to Trusts and Arms Length Organisations (ALEOs) on the value veterans bring to the workplace capitalising on their transferable skills and work ethic.

HR have developed policies on mobilisation and training for reservists including provision to extend current leave periods to cover periods of continuous training. There will also be similar provisions made for CAVs and spouses.

The careers Transition Partnership (CTP) are the MODs preferred provider of resettlement services for those transitioning from military to civilian life. Engagement with CTP commenced in April 2021 and is ongoing. We are now using their 'job board' for recruitment advertising and have agreed to support, where possible, civilian work attachments. Job opportunities are also advertised with 'Forces Families Jobs'.



*Jim Stewart Secretary, Rosyth & West Fife RNA, laying a wreath on Armistice Day*



*Lord Lieutenant of Fife, Robert Balfour, taking the salute from the balcony of Dunfermline Town House at the Airborne Forces parade.*



*Members of the Black Watch Army Cadet Force Band receiving their award at the Civic Awards ceremony at Kirkcaldy Town House.*

## **Civic Office**

The Council's Civic Office plan and arrange among other thing, Commemorative annual events such as Armistice Day and Armed Forces Day. I liaise with the Civic Office and the Provost of Fife on these matters and attend all parades as well as single events such as the commemoration of the 'Battle of The Isle of May' held at Anstruther in February of 2018 and the erection of a memorial to Sergeant John McAulay, Scots Guards, in Kinghorn who was awarded the Victoria Cross in World War 1.

I also presented an Outstanding Achievement Award to the Black Watch Cadet Military Band who are based in Dunfermline at a Civic Awards Ceremony held at the Town House Kirkcaldy in October , 2021. This was following the band's success when they were invited to play at the Nanchang Military Tattoo, by the government of the People's Republic of China.



## **Conclusion**

The current global Covid pandemic has affected us all and has focussed minds on how to maintain business as near normal as possible.

In spite of this, many good things have been achieved for veterans across Fife most notable of which was the completion of The Rosewell Centre in Lochore.

The range of support and services available to service personnel, veterans and their families throughout Fife is extensive and includes everything from advice on military pensions to general welfare, housing, employment, skills training, healthcare, education and much more.

I extend my grateful thanks to all the partner agencies and to the officers of Fife Council who have supported me and who have made a meaningful and sustained contribution to upholding the principles enshrined in the Armed Forces Covenant.

**Councillor Rod Cavanagh**

*Armed Forces & Veterans Community Champion*



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