



**EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE - 23 OCTOBER 2013**

**VETERANS' INTERVIEW PROGRAMME**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE RESOURCES**

**Purpose of Report**

1. A question was raised at the County Council meeting on 25 September 2013 regarding the national Veterans' Interview Programme, asking that a report be prepared for the Employment Committee to consider the issues relating to the adoption of the Scheme.
2. This report sets out the background, together with relevant issues for members' consideration.

**Background**

3. Early In 2013, major cuts were announced to the Defence Budget which have in turn led to both large-scale reorganisation proposals and redundancies within the Armed Forces. Although the proposals have primarily affected the British Army and will continue to do so until 2020, the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force have also been affected.
4. The impact of these changes will inevitably mean that more former service personnel will enter the civilian labour market in the coming years. As the unemployment rate for the UK as at 11 September 2013 stood at around 7.7 million, the current economic climate is likely to be a challenging one for service leavers to join and in which to compete for available jobs.
5. The Veterans' Interview Programme was proposed as a potential means to assist service leavers in finding employment, and was first introduced in June 2013. It was noted that, upon leaving, veterans of the Armed Forces often face challenges resulting from injuries, adjustment or even prejudice, and may require additional assistance when reintegrating into life as a civilian. This can include finding employment.
6. In November 2012, the Veterans' Interview Programme was rolled out nationally via the JobCentrePlus network, and advisors are now encouraging employers to commit to the Programme as well as taking an active role in its implementation.

### **How the Veterans' Interview Programme Operates**

7. The Veterans' Interview Programme is a voluntary Scheme.
8. The Programme does not guarantee that a veteran will be offered a job, or that a job offer will be made ahead of other candidates, but does commit an organisation to offering an interview to any veteran who applies for a job. The Programme is similar to the commitment that the Council has made to supporting job applicants with disabilities under the 'Positive About Disabled People' Scheme, although under the latter Scheme, candidates have to demonstrate on application that they meet the essential criteria.
9. The Scheme also welcomes other forms of 'increased employment support' for veterans seeking jobs, although actual examples of this additional support in practice are not currently available.
10. JobCentrePlus advisors also play an active role in matching veterans with potentially suitable vacancies advertised by employers who have signed up to the Scheme.

### **How the Council could implement the Veterans' Interview Programme**

11. There are no specific requirements other than the commitment to offer a guaranteed interview to any veteran applying for a role with the Council. It is noted that there is no provision within the Scheme for the applicant to be suitably qualified for the role, which may cause a practical difficulty for managers, who have to measure 'potential suitability' in other ways.
12. Other steps which could be taken may include a:
  - Web page explaining the Scheme;
  - Method of identifying a veteran at application stage, eg. a check box on the application form;
  - Statement included in job advertisements highlighting the commitment the Council has made to the Veterans' Interview Programme.
13. As at 1 April 2013, 9.7% of those employed by the UK Armed Forces were female, and 7.1% from BME backgrounds.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore likely that the job seekers who are likely to take up the Veterans' Interview Programme will reflect these characteristics.
14. In the first quarter of the year 2013-14, the Council's workforce comprised 73.2% female employees and 10.3% from BME backgrounds.

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Defence, *UK Armed Forces Personnel Report* 1 April 2013  
[http://www.dasa.mod.uk/publications/personnel/military/annual-personnel-report/2013/1\\_april\\_2013.pdf](http://www.dasa.mod.uk/publications/personnel/military/annual-personnel-report/2013/1_april_2013.pdf)  
 [Accessed 20th September 2013]

15. While steps which may, either directly or indirectly, increase the number of male Council employees could help to create a more representative workforce, the same may not apply in relation to BME applicants and employees. It is therefore recommended that an Equality Impact Assessment should be carried out prior to implementing this Programme.

### **Advantages and Disadvantages of Implementing this Programme**

16. Advantages:

- Attracting quality applicants with transferable and useful skills into the workforce;
- Strengthen the Council's position as a supporter of veterans and the Armed Forces;
- Greater variety of opportunities for veterans to apply for. Many employers currently offering the Programme are private sector retailers (such as Greggs, Aldi and John Lewis) and roles with the Council could offer an alternative;
- Opportunities for the Council to publicise its commitment to veterans;
- Reduce barriers experienced by veterans in adjusting to civilian life, in particular - prejudices which may be faced when seeking employment.

17. Disadvantages:

- The Scheme may not support the Council's commitment to equality of opportunity, and particularly towards employees and applicants from Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) backgrounds;
- Few public sector employers appear to be committed to the Veterans' Interview Programme, and the implications for equal opportunities may form part of the underlying reason;
- It is currently unclear if it would be sufficient for the Council to offer guaranteed interviews to applicants who meet the person specification, as the wording of the guidance available refers to 'all' applicants who are veterans;
- The recruitment and selection process would need to be adjusted to accommodate the Veterans' Interview Programme, including steps such as creating webpages, amending application forms, and providing guidance to the Employment Services Centre (ESC) and managers. This may require significant investment of resources.

### **Employer Commitments**

18. Should the Council continue to represent itself as an employer committed to the Veterans' Interview Programme, it would be necessary to provide a short annual update using a template provided by the Department for Work and Pensions.

19. No particular financial commitment would be required, although some cost may initially be incurred in highlighting the Programme to job applicants, for example in amending application forms or setting up web pages.

### **Recommendations**

20. The Committee is asked to consider the content of the report and note that, at this stage it is not proposed that the Veteran Interview Programme in its current form be adopted.

### **Background Papers**

None.

### **Circulation under Local Issues Alert Procedures**

None.

### **Officer to Contact:**

Gordon McFarlane, Assistant Director – People & Transformation

Tel: 0116 305 6123

Email: [Gordon.mcfarlane@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Gordon.mcfarlane@leics.gov.uk)

### **Equal Opportunities Implications**

21. The most fundamental equalities consideration is that a Scheme such as this would provide an advantage to a non-protected group (ie. under the Equalities Act 2010, there are nine protected characteristics, including disability). As stated in 3.2 above, there is a risk that this Scheme would confer a greater advantage to a non-protected group than those with protected characteristics.