

Cabinet 24.04.23

PROGRESSION OF THE DEFENCE EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME (DERS)

Purpose:

To strengthen our ongoing commitment to the Armed Forces Community

Recommendations / key decisions required:

1. Approve decision to apply for the (DERS) at Silver Award Level.
2. To agree to work towards offering the Guaranteed interview scheme.

Reasons:

To support our current and future Armed Forces Community as employees of Carmarthenshire County Council

Cabinet Decision Required	YES
Council Decision Required	NO

CABINET MEMBER PORTFOLIO HOLDER: Cllr Phillip Hughes, Cabinet Member for Organisation and Workforce (including Armed Forces Champion)

Directorate: Chief Executive	Designations:	Tel: 01267 246270 01267 224 008 07717450846
Name of Head of Service: Noelwyn Daniel & Paul Thomas	Head of ICT and Corporate Policy, Chief Executive's Department	E Mail Addresses: NDaniel@carmarthenshire.gov.uk
	Assistant Chief Executive	PRThomas@carmarthenshire.gov.uk
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Progression of the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (DERS)

In October 2021 the Cabinet gave their approval for the Council to re-sign the Armed Forces Covenant which pledged a commitment to apply for the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (DERS). The DERS encourages employers to support those serving (reservists) or who have served in the armed forces (veterans) and their dependants. It aligns with the Armed Forces Covenant which is a pledge to the Armed Forces Community and their families that they will be given respect and fairness in the United Kingdom that they serve.

Why do we need an Armed Forces Covenant? Life in the Armed Forces is different to the rest of society. Whilst a military career is challenging and rewarding, Armed Forces personnel make sacrifices in order to serve. They go where they are sent, when they are sent. Families will have to move, sometimes with little notice, to unfamiliar areas. Or they may have to live apart for extended periods of time and cope with the issues this can bring. And they will face the stresses and strains that arise when their loved ones are deployed on operational commitments. All of this means they can find themselves at a disadvantage in comparison with their civilian neighbours in accessing the goods and services that as citizens we should all expect.

The DERS encompasses Bronze, Silver and Gold Awards for employers that pledge, demonstrate or advocate support to the Armed Forces Community, and uphold the principles which are:

- (a) the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the armed forces;*
- (b) that it is desirable to remove disadvantages arising for service people from membership, or former membership, of the armed forces; and*
- (c) that special provision for service people may be justified by the effects on such people of membership, or former membership, of the armed forces (in respect of those who have services related medical conditions or injuries and the bereaved).*

Carmarthenshire County Council recognises the contribution of veterans, reservists, dependants and the value that they bring to our communities and businesses. The Council currently employ members of the Armed Forces Community, to include veterans, serving reservists, their dependants Cadet Forces Adult Volunteers.

In July 2022 we reaffirmed our commitment to the armed forces community by re-signing the covenant and pledged to *apply for the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme award*.

Carmarthenshire County Council applied and were awarded the bronze level in February 2022 and based on the work undertaken the Council could now fulfil the criteria for Silver Award level. The essential criteria for silver are noted below along with a note of the Council's current status in relation to each requirement which demonstrates that we could fulfil the requirements:

Silver Criteria	Council Status
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<i>Organisations <u>must</u> have signed the AFC.</i>	Completed.
<i>The employer <u>must</u> have already stated their intent to be supportive by using the ERS website to register at the Bronze Level.</i>	Completed.
<i>The employer must proactively demonstrate that Service personnel/Armed Forces community are not unfairly disadvantaged as part of their recruiting and selection processes</i>	Completed. We already fulfil this requirement but adopting the Guaranteed Interview Scheme as noted below could further enhance the Council's approach.
<i>The employer must actively ensure that their workforce is aware of their positive policies towards Defence People issues. For example, an employer nominated for support to the Reserves must have an internally publicised and positive HR policy on Reserves. In the case where no HR policy exists this should be demonstrated by specific references in job descriptions or on the organisation's website</i>	Completed.
<i>Within the context of Reserves the employer must have demonstrated support to mobilisations or have a framework in place</i>	Completed. Outlined in the Council's Time off Policy
<i>The employer must demonstrate support to training by providing at least 5 days' additional leave</i>	Completed. The Council's Time Off Policy states " <i>Attendance for training in the non-regular armed forces should be taken out of annual leave, flexi-leave or an application should be made for unpaid leave. All leave requests will be considered subject to service requirements</i> ". As unpaid leave is allowed within the scope of the current Time Off Policy then the criteria for DERS Silver Award is met. However, the requirement to achieve the DERS Gold Award requires an employer to provide "at least 10 days' additional leave for training, fully paid".
<i>The employer must not have been the subject of any negative PR or media activity that could cause embarrassment to Defence.</i>	Completed

Applying and subsequently being awarded this level would be a tangible demonstration of our commitment to our armed forces community.

Additional options to consider

As noted, unpaid leave is allowed within the scope of the current Time Off Policy and therefore the criteria for DERS Silver Award is met. However, to achieve the DERS Gold Award requires an employer to provide “*at least 10 days’ additional leave for training, fully paid*”.

As an interim step, the Council may wish to consider providing employee reservists with up to 5 days additional paid leave for reserve training.

The Council does not currently hold data on the number of employees who are reservists therefore, at this time, it is not possible to estimate a cost should a decision be taken to change the existing policy and allow up to 5 days additional paid leave for reserve training. However, should this be something the Council wants to work towards arrangements could be made to capture this information for new employees as part of the existing functionality of the new recruitment system (should we choose to use it).

Guaranteed Interview Scheme

There is a scheme that the Council could adopt to provide a guaranteed interview for armed forces service leavers, provided that the service leaver is within 12-weeks of pending discharge, or the Armed Forces was the last long-term employer. This would operate in a similar manner to the disability confidence scheme the Council currently implements.

This scheme extends to reservists and spouses of those currently serving. The job applicant needs to meet the essential criteria for the advertised role.

This could be rolled out across Council vacancies alongside the introduction of the new recruitment system.

DETAILED REPORT ATTACHED?

NO

IMPLICATIONS

I confirm that other than those implications which have been agreed with the appropriate Directors / Heads of Service and are referred to in detail below, there are no other implications associated with this report:

Signed: **Noelwyn Daniel, Head of ICT & Corporate Policy**
Paul Thomas, Assistant Chief Executive (People Management)

Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities	Legal	Finance	ICT	Risk Management Issues	Staffing Implications	Physical Assets
NONE	NONE	NONE	NONE	NONE	YES	NONE

7. Staffing Implications

Depending on the favoured approach, relevant workforce related policies will be updated.

To further develop our understanding of the Council's workforce status in relation to the armed forces, the new recruitment system will include a means to capture data on newly recruited candidates' armed forces status and will then be filtered through to Resource Link as part of the employee's record for successful candidates.

CONSULTATIONS

I confirm that the appropriate consultations have taken in place and the outcomes are as detailed below

Signed: Noelwyn Daniel, Head of CIT & Corporate Policy
 Paul Thomas, Assistant Chief Executive (People Management)

(Please specify the outcomes of consultations undertaken where they arise against the following headings)

1. Scrutiny Committee request for pre-determination	NO
If yes include the following information: -	
Scrutiny Committee	
Date the report was considered:-	
Scrutiny Committee Outcome/Recommendations:-	

2. Local Member(s)

Name(s) of local member(s) and individual comments to be included, if appropriate.
 N/A

3. Community / Town Council

Name(s) of Town/Community Councils(s) and individual comments to be included, if appropriate
 N/A

4. Relevant Partners

Name(s) and individual comments to be included, if appropriate
 N/A

5. Staff Side Representatives and other Organisations

Name(s) and individual comments to be included, if appropriate
 N/A

CABINET MEMBER PORTFOLIO HOLDER(S) AWARE/CONSULTED YES	Cllr. Philip Hughes has been briefed on this proposal
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Section 100D Local Government Act, 1972 – Access to Information
 List of Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

THESE ARE DETAILED BELOW

Title of Document	File Ref No.	Locations that the papers are available for public inspection
Defence Employer Recognition Scheme		Defence Employer Recognition Scheme - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)