



Scottish Veterans Commissioner

Making life better for Scotland's ex-Service community

3-year Strategic Plan 2023-25

Introduction

This strategic plan sets out my **mission** and **mandate, vision** and **values** and offers an outline of the work I will be pursuing during my 3 year appointment as Scottish Veterans Commissioner. It sets a path and priorities as well as the next steps and approach my office and I will be taking. Some of this work may be more long term and continue beyond the end of my tenure and this would be a decision for my successor.

My strategic planning is informed by: **The Armed Forces Covenant** and **Renewing our Commitments**, which set out the Scottish Government's ambition to make Scotland the destination of choice for those leaving the military and its priorities for action; the direction set in the joint ten-year '**A Strategy for Our Veterans**' which aims, by 2028, to see every veteran feel even more valued, supported and empowered and never disadvantaged as a result of their Service; the '**A Strategy for Our Veterans**' **Action Plans** from both the UK and Scottish Governments; my own **annual assessment and Report on Progress** against my predecessors' recommendations. Most importantly, my work will be informed by what I hear and observe in my interactions with veterans and their families, directly and with the organisations who support their interests.

MY MISSION AND MANDATE

My Mission

Independent from government, my mission is to advocate for our veterans and their families, working collaboratively across boundaries, to influence policy and service delivery and make life better for the ex-Service community who live in Scotland.

My Mandate

The office of the Scottish Veterans Commissioner was created by the Scottish Government in 2014, with a mandate to improve outcomes for veterans and their families in Scotland.

Engagement sits at the core of my work and forging positive working relationships with a range of stakeholders helps to identify and promote: best practice, what works, what needs to change and what new opportunities exist for improvement in devolved areas.

My mandate is reflected in:

My objectives - which are determined administratively by Scottish Ministers and reviewed on an annual basis. I am not an Ombudsman and do not have the power to investigate individual cases or complaints or to offer direct advice or support. My power lies in my experience, independence and the influence I can bring to bear.

My independent role from government, its statutory delivery partners and the charities that support veterans, which affords me the freedom and space to:

- ◆ Form and offer an impartial view

- ◆ Be responsive and open to all new thinking
 - ◆ Supply supportive challenge to policy makers and decision takers
 - ◆ Make authoritative recommendations for improvement and track and report regularly on their delivery
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MY VISION

I want to see a Scotland where the contributions and sacrifices made by veterans and their families are recognised and appreciated and where *all* veterans feel valued by society. They should be enabled to live as satisfying and fulfilling a life as possible, and where and when it's needed, be able to access effective and timely advice and support.

MY VALUES

The 7 Principles of Public Life will guide me in all my work to secure the best possible outcomes for our veterans and their families and in helping make Scotland the destination of choice for Service leavers.

I will also be guided in all I do by the following values specific to my role:

- ◆ Honour the service and achievements of those who have served
 - ◆ Have regard to the diverse needs and concerns of veterans and their families
 - ◆ Challenge misconceptions and myths that persist about veterans
 - ◆ Work in an open and inclusive way
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MY STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Over my three-year tenure as Commissioner I want to achieve progress against four long-term outcomes:

Our veterans and their families are empowered to make informed choices to secure positive futures

The diversity of our veterans community is clearly recognised and valued, with support and services equally accessible to all

Policy makers, service providers and the 3rd sector will be responsive to need, collaborative in approach and aligned in their efforts to maximise positive outcomes

Our communities and employers better understand, value and support veterans as they return to civilian life, to contribute to society and build fulfilling lives

In doing so, my priorities will be to:

- ◆ Aid, improve and build understanding of veterans and their families, their needs and attributes and what they bring to our society
- ◆ Encourage a person-centred and inclusive approach, where the veteran and their family are put front and centre in decisions and are able to decide what's best for them
- ◆ Drive delivery and maintain improvement towards all SVC recommendations
- ◆ Encourage collaboration and creative thinking in the delivery of SVC recommendations and Scottish Government actions in response to "A Strategy for our Veterans"

MY NEXT STEPS

In the three years of my tenure I will look specifically at the following areas, in line with the key themes and outcomes set out in the 10 year UK-wide 'A Strategy for our Veterans':

Community and relationships – this will look into the experiences of the wider veterans community and how well served all veterans and their families are by existing services. It will consider the particular needs and challenges faced by women and LGBT+ veterans.

Veterans and the law – this will look at whether the right support is in place for the small minority of veterans in custody or who come into contact with the criminal justice system; whether that support is reducing the risk of re-offending and at what support is available to spouses/partners and children.

Finance and debt – I will look at the advice, guidance and support provided for veterans as they return to civilian life and in the longer-term. This will include consideration of the action aimed at ensuring veterans have sufficient financial education and awareness to be financially self-supporting and resilient and potential inequality or disadvantage in statutory financial support.

I expect to publish my findings on the first of these by the end of 2023.

MY APPROACH

In practice I will deliver this day to day by:

- ◆ Engaging, listening, and acting on the experience of veterans collectively
 - ◆ Acting for veterans at a strategic level, as a strong independent voice for policies and actions that will drive change
 - ◆ Providing scrutiny and supportive challenge to policy makers and those providing services to veterans and their families
 - ◆ Promoting the valuable contribution and benefits that veterans and their families can bring to Scotland
 - ◆ Making sure veterans' and their families' needs are properly understood, communicated and supported by policy makers, service providers and employers
 - ◆ Ensuring that veterans are well informed and given the right information so they know what to expect and understand their responsibilities as individuals
 - ◆ Encouraging all UK Service leavers to see Scotland as an inclusive and welcoming place of opportunity for them and their families to settle
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STRATEGY MAP/OVERVIEW

Continuously

Listening to and acting on the experiences of veterans (individually and collectively) with the aim of improving understanding of their changing needs and of all they bring to civilian life.

I will provide a collective voice for veterans in Scotland, helping service providers and policy makers focus on veterans' experiences and needs.

In my 3 year tenure I will do this by:

1. Monitoring and reporting progress against all SVC recommendations accepted by the Scottish Government

I will monitor progress and publish open, fact-based annual assessments as to how things are improving via the 'Progress' area of my website. I will next report in autumn 2023.

This will not only tell us whether actions are improving outcomes for our veterans but will also serve to shine a light on areas where they are falling short of what is needed and where corrective or alternative action should be considered.

2. Challenging delivery - the pace and sustainability of change and quality and availability of provision

I will meet regularly with stakeholders, policy holders and delivery partners to ensure there is forward movement and no regression across recommendations.

I will also aim to meet regularly with the Cabinet Secretary for Veterans and with portfolio Ministers as required to discuss areas of particular challenge highlighted by my progress reporting and other developments.

3. Making further recommendations for outcomes-focussed improvements

I will look into the following areas in line with the outcomes set in the 10 Year UK-wide 'Strategy for our Veterans':

- ◆ Community and Relationships
- ◆ Veterans and the Law
- ◆ Finance and Debt

I expect to publish my findings on the first of these by the end of 2023.

4. Having regard to and encouraging equality and diversity

- ◆ **Equality** – ensuring my recommendations are inclusive and no one is discriminated against because of their characteristics, background or lifestyle.
- ◆ **Diversity** – recognising and valuing the differences between people.

[1] <https://www.gov.scot/publications/renewing-commitments/>

[2] <https://www.gov.scot/programme-for-government/>