

The City of Edinburgh Council

10.00am, Thursday 10 February 2022

Lord Provost's Commission: The Strategy for Our Ex Forces Personnel – Summary Report

Item number	
Executive/routine	Executive
Wards	All wards
Council Commitments	2, 6, 7, 9, 15, 18, 31, 46, 47, 51, 52

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Council:
- 1.1.1 recognises the key role of the Lord Provost as Armed Forces and Veterans' Champion for the city;
 - 1.1.2 commends the initiative taken in establishing the Lord Provost's Commission: The Strategy for Our Ex Forces Personnel;
 - 1.1.3 notes the summary findings and exemplar actions as set out in paragraphs 4.14 to 4.41 of this report;
 - 1.1.4 notes the potential body of work for the Lord Provost in the next administration as set out in paragraphs 5.5 and 5.6;
 - 1.1.5 thanks the Commissioners and evidence providers for their sterling contribution to this piece of work;
 - 1.1.6 agrees that this report be shared and disseminated to the relevant bodies, including the Scottish Government; and,
 - 1.1.7 refers this report to Edinburgh Napier University for joint research with Edinburgh University on Service Leavers' aspirations, concerns and support needs.

Stephen S. Moir
Executive Director of Corporate Services

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Lord Provost's Commission: The Strategy for Our Ex Forces Personnel – Summary Report

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report details the work of the Lord Provost's Commission "The Strategy for Our Ex Services Personnel" which met from 10 April 2019 to 27 September 2021.
- 2.2 Summary findings from the evidence presented to the Commissioners at a series of workshops are presented together with exemplars of action taken.
- 2.3 A way forward for the Lord Provost in the next administration is set out in the conclusion and the report is recommended for wider circulation as appropriate.

3. Background

- 3.1 Following the Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee on 26 February 2019, a Lord Provost Commission was set up in response to the government's consultation on "The Strategy for our Veterans".
- 3.2 This initiative complemented the Council's decision to sign the Armed Forces Covenant for Business and to apply for the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Standard by 8 March 2019.
- 3.3 The Commission met for the first time on 10 April 2019 and then agreed its remit as:
Dedicated to supporting fully Ex Forces personnel and their families in making smooth transitions back into the civilian workforce and civic life of the City of Edinburgh and contributing fully to a community that understands and values what they have done and what they have to offer
- 3.4 Since then the Commission has held a series of workshops and taken evidence on a range of key themes including housing; education, training & employment; and health & wellbeing. Evidence providers were drawn from a range of statutory providers, military services and charitable bodies.
- 3.5 A final session to hear from those with "Lived Experience" took place in the City Chambers Business Centre on 27 September 2021, bringing this phase to a close.
- 3.6 The results found and main conclusions to be drawn are set out in the body of the report below.

4. Main report

- 4.1 Edinburgh is a Garrison City and home to a sizeable population of some 1500 serving Armed Forces personnel based at Dreghorn and Redford Barracks, Edinburgh Castle and Glencorse (Midlothian). There are also Reserve units including the Royal Marines Reserve, Army Reserve and the Royal Auxiliary Air Force (RAuxAF).
- 4.2 As well as serving personnel, Veterans Scotland estimates that veterans represent approximately 5-10% of the population. In Edinburgh this is likely to be towards the higher end due to the serving personnel footprint.
- 4.3 With this significant presence in the city, combined with the Lord Provost's role as Veterans Champion, there needed to be a coherent local response to the UK Strategy for our Veterans. This was launched by the Scottish Government in November 2018 setting out a 10 year Vision whereby:

“Those who have served in the UK Armed Forces, and their families, transition smoothly back into civilian life and contribute fully to a society that understands and values what they have done and what they have to offer”.

Setting Up of Lord Provost's Commission

- 4.4 In order to examine issues of transition in the Edinburgh context it was decided to establish a Commission in keeping with previous explorations of civic issues:
- Lord Provost Eric Milligan Commission dedicated to tackling social exclusion and finding practical ways of enabling all citizens to benefit from the city's growing prosperity (1998/2000).
 - Lord Provost Donald Wilson Commission dedicated to sustaining, revitalising and reusing Edinburgh's unique civic buildings and assets (2016/17).
- 4.5 The first meeting of the Commission, chaired by the Lord Provost, took place in the City Chambers on 10 April 2019. Members comprised:
- Commanding Officer, Scotland and Northern Ireland Personnel Recovery Unit
 - Garrison Commander, Edinburgh Castle
 - Naval Regional Commander, Scotland and Northern Ireland
 - Air Officer Scotland
 - Scottish Veterans Commissioner
 - Executive Director of Resources/Corporate Services, City of Edinburgh Council

- 4.6 Additional membership and “alternate” information is noted in appendix one. Throughout, the secretariat was drawn from the Lord Provost’s Office with support from the Council’s Armed Forces Covenant lead officer.

Early Action

- 4.7 Over the course of the first two Commission meetings (held on 10 April and 14 June 2019) a logo and remit were agreed:



THE STRATEGY FOR OUR EX FORCES PERSONNEL LORD PROVOST’S COMMISSION

Dedicated to supporting fully Ex Forces personnel and their families in making smooth transitions back into the civilian workforce and civic life of the City of Edinburgh and contributing fully to a community that understands and values what they have done and what they have to offer.

- 4.8 In the run up to Armed Forces Day on 22 June 2019, an opportunity to deliver key messages was identified. Issued by the Council’s media team in the press release for the event, these included:
- the importance of our current and ex-forces personnel to Edinburgh and the strong and enduring relationship we have;
 - support for the Veterans Strategy for the UK and the work of the Veterans Commission for Scotland; and
 - the establishment of a Commission with the intention of making the transition to civilian and civic life smoother and ensuring that the City is both welcoming and values ex-forces personnel and their families for their service and, importantly, for the contribution that they can make to our community in the future.
- 4.9 These points were echoed in the Lord Provost’s speech on the day which demonstrated that Edinburgh was taking a lead on the Armed Forces Covenant for Business, the new Commission and a Guide for Edinburgh’s Service Community.
- 4.10 It was also decided in the initial stages of the Commission to hold a series of themed Workshops, beginning with Housing and Education/Employment. The rationale is set out in appendix two, with the stated purpose of learning from experience and shaping future policy and priorities for action.
- 4.11 A series of Workshops (virtual due to the pandemic) took place as place as follows:
- | Date: | Theme: |
|------------------|--|
| 9 December 2019 | Housing Matters |
| 2 September 2020 | Education, Training and Employment |
| 1 December 2020 | Education, Training and Employment cont. |
| 16 March 2021 | Health & Wellbeing |
| 19 May 2021 | Health & Wellbeing cont. and Work of Charities |

- 4.12 This work concluded on 27 September 2021 with a real Workshop to hear from those with “Lived Experience” at the City Chambers Business Centre. Conversations with Ex Services Personnel from Veterans Housing Scotland, the Lothians Veterans Centre, and the Thistle Organisation were led by the Lord Provost, Air Officer Scotland and the Commanding Officer from the SNI Personnel Recovery Unit respectively.
- 4.13 The feedback obtained affirmed the findings of the previous sessions as set out below. Fuller detail on the contributors to all six Workshops is set out in appendix three to this report.

Summary Findings and Exemplar Actions

- 4.14 From the outset of the Commission in April 2019, there was a clear intention to recognise the needs of all Ex Forces personnel as well as the estimated 5% of “problematic cases”. It was also agreed to take a wider view of the whole family, not just individuals, and to include issues of transition back into the workforce as well as into the community.
- 4.15 This holistic approach sat well with the Scottish Government Strategy and with the Scottish Veterans Commissioner report ‘Positive Futures Getting Transition Right in Scotland’ (December 20120). The expectation was that the Commission would test findings made and identify further areas for improvement, in the context of the City of Edinburgh.

Housing

- 4.16 The housing market in Edinburgh is extremely challenging for Ex Forces personnel. Whilst extra points on the housing waiting list are awarded to those applicants who declare an armed forces background (within 3 years of leaving the service) suitable housing in the city is still not attainable for many people.
- 4.17 Unique factors include the attractiveness of Edinburgh as a place to live and work. Demand is outstripping supply in the social housing sector with a lack of affordable housing to meet the needs of those leaving the services. Homeless applicants (an estimated 50 to 60 on the waiting list) may have to stay in temporary accommodation for up to two years and face a penalty if an offer of property deemed suitable is refused.
- 4.18 High property prices in the private sector mean that many couples leaving married quarters do not have the financial means to purchase new homes. Those in work are often also priced out of the rental market with average rents in the private sector amounting to £1,100 per month. The same applies to Reservists who are heavily relied upon by the military.
- 4.19 Against this background, a key priority is to provide more suitable homes with some highly innovative approaches. These include the Salvesen Gardens and Citypark Way schemes which utilise the “Communities within Communities” model.

ACTION

Key evidence on 9 December 2019 from CEC Housing Development was that the concept of “communities within communities” was vital to the mutual support and shared experience of veterans and their families.

Action taken on 14 October 2021: The Lord Provost and Depute Lord Provost promoted the launch of Veterans Housing Scotland (replacing the Scottish Veterans’ Garden City Charity). Based in Edinburgh, the new body aims to influence housing policy, improve existing homes and provide more homes for veterans and their families. Continuing with the communities model, the location of homes close to lines of communication and centres of employment is also vital.

4.20 Other recognised priorities include the need for:

- inter-agency data and information sharing to ensure that the needs of ex-forces personnel and their families are picked up swiftly by the various housing agencies;
- land and sites to be released for the provision of affordable housing for veterans;
- low cost housing for life to be provided for disabled veterans and their families;
- maximising the social housing potential from sites such as Craighiehall which are to be disposed of by the MOD; and
- more direct input into national and local housing policy and land use planning policy by those responsible for the housing needs of Ex Forces personnel.

Education, Training and Employment

- 4.21 Personnel leaving the armed forces face many challenges in accessing appropriate education, training and employment opportunities. A combination of factors includes the intense competition in a very dynamic labour market. In certain sectors there is a ratio of 1,000 applicants to only one job. Barriers to transition are also exacerbated when leavers are too late in engaging with the services available or individuals stop engaging due to somewhat unrealistic expectations.
- 4.22 Measures to address these issues are being implemented by the key education, training and employment providers in Edinburgh. The Capital City Partnership (an ALEO of CEC) is, for example, utilising a ‘Jobs Pipeline’ approach to helping Ex Forces personnel progress through education and training programmes into meaningful employment. Considerable support is needed at each stage of the pipeline though and complex personal issues often prevent full use of the programme by participants.
- 4.23 A particular issue is the difficulty faced by many service leavers (even those well prepared at an early stage) in getting through the sifting process with employers, due to the apparent lack of essential skills. This is due in part to misconceptions regarding the nature and role of service personnel and lack of recognition of transferable skills. There is added value in, for example, the set of soft skills that many service leavers have.
- 4.24 There are indications that employers (including the Council as a Gold Employer under the Armed Forces Recognition Scheme) are changing and taking life experience into account. Different use of language and terminology is needed to help break down barriers and support those applying for jobs.

- 4.25 A key priority is to disseminate the key message to employers in recognising the benefits of hiring Ex Forces personnel. One approach taken by the Army is to establish “military insight days” with employers through the Regional Employers Engagement Board. This initiative could be extended across the commercial sector.

ACTION

Key evidence on 1 December 2020 from the Careers Transition Partnership was that more work was needed to highlight the transferable skills of Ex Services personnel to employers.

Action taken on 7 October 2021: The Garrison Commander at Edinburgh Castle, the Lord Provost and Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce hosted a ‘Big Breakfast’ with employers to promote the employment of ex-services personnel and reservists by:

- Developing employer understanding of the skills sets, capacity and potential of ex-services personnel; and
- Encouraging employers to commit to the Armed Forces Covenant Employer Recognition Scheme.

- 4.26 Other recognised priorities include the need for:

- better connectivity and interagency links across the broad landscape of support services for veterans and ex-military staff;
- sharing information, key contacts and publications to broaden knowledge of the support available;
- continual engagement and co-ordinated responses to those seeking assistance;
- the provision of careers advice and guidance (and labour market information relevant to the area for resettlement) at an earlier stage in the leaving process;
- seeding access to FE/HE whilst in-service, rather than as veterans; and
- a comprehensive mapping tool that describes the education, training and employment journey from a career in the Forces into the civilian labour market.

Health and Wellbeing

- 4.27 Support services are key to the health and wellbeing of Ex Services personnel and their families when transitioning to civilian life and meeting new challenges. Barriers to accessing the right help are commonplace though and the support landscape can appear complex and difficult to understand.
- 4.28 The language used by providers is also considered to be off putting for service personnel who are proud and reluctant to show weakness in accessing support services. In a measure to counter this trend, NHS England has for example launched ‘Operation Courage’ to help boost the confidence of individuals searching for or using appropriate sources of help.
- 4.29 It is reported that the needs of today’s service leavers and veterans are increasingly complex, encompassing a range of factors such as loneliness, isolation, addiction and drug abuse. There is also evidence that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is not being diagnosed early enough in sufferers.
- 4.30 COVID has also impacted negatively on employment levels, including for those transitioning. This has contributed adversely towards poorer mental health and a greater risk of suicide.

- 4.31 Agencies such as Veterans First Point Lothian are receiving a high number of calls from those in crisis and “lock down” is causing an increase in the number of people in the sector with mental health issues. The Scotland and Northern Ireland Personnel Recovery Unit reported that some 80% of personnel being supported into civilian life were experiencing mental health issues.
- 4.32 With mental health a key priority, the Lord Provost was invited to discuss the implications and possible measures with Maurice Corry MSP, Convener of the Cross-Party Group on the Armed Forces and Veterans Community. A conversation took place on 15 January 2021 when it was agreed that the Commission was covering areas relevant to the Cross-Party Group and that the Commission’s report would be submitted as evidence.
- 4.33 A key priority is getting it right with the first point of contact when seeking support. In the case of GPs there is concern, however, that doctors in general practice do not always have sufficient knowledge of the sector.

ACTION

Key evidence on 16 March 2021 from the Veterans Welfare Service (VWS) was that GPs were often not aware of the wide range of veterans and ex -military support services in their areas. This can be an issue if patients are presenting with mental health issues.

Action taken on 6 May 2021: The VWS was introduced and linked up with ‘Thrive Edinburgh’, a new initiative bringing together mental-health and wellbeing services. Chaired by the Lord Provost, this includes GPs in an active interface and information exchange with all key providers of emotional and mental health services across the key sectors in the city.

- 4.34 Other recognised priorities include the need for:

- early contact with Ex Forces personnel, prior to service release;
- increased cooperative working and better co-ordination of services;
- signposting by providers to other key support agencies which treat specific issues;
- highlighting the level of care and support available for the wider family unit;
- building the resilience of Ex Forces personnel in order to improve mental health;
- enabling Veterans to use their skills positively in supporting other Veterans;
- creating hubs that would allow for service integration and enable clients to access a wide range of services; and
- further development of drop-in centres based on the Lothians Veterans Centre model whereby users see themselves as adding value to services as well as being the beneficiaries.

Lived Experience

- 4.35 In order to test the information from service providers at the previous workshops, it was decided to hear the “other half of the story” from users and clients of the agencies concerned. Hence contributions were invited from Ex Forces personnel connected to Veterans Housing Scotland, the Lothians Veterans Centre Group and the Thistle Foundation.
- 4.36 The key outcome at this final workshop was the validation and confirmation of the earlier findings reached by the Commission. Participants emphasised that civilian

life was very different to service life which was highly organised and structured. In contrast, all aspects of leaving the services were thought to cause stress for the whole family. Levels of knowledge on the sources of help available were variable.

- 4.37 When asked about one thing that would make the move better, the overwhelming response was “Housing” which was identified as a major downfall for Ex Forces personnel and their families. Finding housing is the very first thing that needs to be done on transiting but applying for accommodation takes ages. This delayed process is not generally advised upon or talked about and comes as a nasty shock.
- 4.38 It was reported by those with direct experience that families can fall apart whilst waiting for housing. Difficulties in securing the right sort of accommodation in the right place were also a root of cause of delays in getting jobs. Children’s education was also thought to suffer as a result.
- 4.39 The worst examples cited were of families being evicted from service accommodation having not found an alternative. This resulted in homelessness, the split up of the family and subsequent issues of mental ill health and addiction.
- 4.40 Across the conversations the need for greater emphasis on mental health was again highlighted. Long delays in being diagnosed for Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome were spoken about. It was also thought that more needed to be done to enable GPs to understand better the issues facing Ex Forces personnel.
- 4.41 In general, there was a lack of clarity about the support services available and the lack of drop in facilities was identified. Amongst those who had left the services some time ago, there was a feeling that not much had improved since then.

Conclusion

- 4.42 Providing the correct help and support to Ex-Forces personnel and their families has been a challenge to governments and agencies around the world for many years. In the UK and Scotland there has been increasing priority placed on meeting evident needs through the advent of the Armed Forces Covenant and appointment of Veterans’ Champions.
- 4.43 In Edinburgh, the Lord Provost has established a Commission to examine and improve the city’s position in supporting the transition from military to civilian life. The conclusion is that whilst considerable progress has been made, there is still much more to do in smoothing the pathway ahead. This is very much in step with the work and findings of the Scottish Veterans’ Commissioner.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 In general, there is a plea for the various support organisations to work together rather than seek to protect “little fiefdoms”. Improved connectivity between service providers, with more effective service integration and sharing of information and data, would improve the experience of those transitioning to civilian life. The key

agencies agree that more effective co-ordination, possibly through a network of hubs, would help enormously.

- 5.2 Better signposting and awareness raising around the plethora of support agencies that are in existence is identified as a key priority. A specific proposal was for a “Gateway to Services for Personnel” where the support community exists physically and there is a door on which to knock.
- 5.3 Emphasis is also placed on better preparation prior to leaving the Services. There is a clear need for earlier and clearer information which is “people proof” and is made available at least five years in advance of exiting. The concept of civilian accreditation was also advocated with suitable course content that would, for example, include procedures for getting into Council house waiting lists.
- 5.4 Responsibility for such action sits with a wide range of statutory and voluntary partners as well as with the Armed Forces providers directly. This report should therefore be shared and disseminated to the relevant bodies, including the Scottish Government, for information and action as well as future policy making.
- 5.5 In terms of the Council’s domain, there are specific areas requiring further investigation including:
- tailored measures to support housing need and to address homelessness;
 - initiatives to support employment and training, particularly in light of the Council’s gold status under the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme; and
 - the potential of 20 minute neighbourhoods as community support hubs for Ex Forces personnel across the city.
- 5.6 The Lord Provost in the next administration would be well placed to take this work further, with the necessary support and input from Senior Officers across the Council. In the meantime, this report can also be referred to Edinburgh Napier University for research into experiences of resettlement/transition from military to civilian life in Scotland.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The Office of Lord Provost operates within the budget allocated, amounting to £486,082 in 2021/22. This has covered any additional cost to the Council arising from the work of the Commission in this financial year.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 The Office of the Lord Provost routinely undertakes engagement and co-production with a broad range of stakeholders, leading community representatives and business organisations.
- 7.2 Speeches and other inputs for events are developed in consultation with the organisers.
- 7.3 The Office of the Lord Provost assists both the Council and city partners to deliver key equality and rights outcomes, and to meet the Equality Act 2010 public sector equality duties to (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation, (ii) advance equality of opportunity, and (iii) foster good relations.
- 7.4 The Lord Provost's stewardship of the One City Trust is also an important lever in helping to mitigate the negative impacts of poverty and inequality across the Capital.
- 7.5 The Office of the Lord Provost endeavours to mitigate carbon impacts by utilising public transport where and when appropriate, where any long-distance travelling is required.
- 7.6 The Office of the Lord Provost contributes to the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 public sector duties and contributes to the delivery of Sustainable Edinburgh 2020 objectives, the advancement of vibrant flourishing communities, social and economic wellbeing and an efficient and effectively managed city.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 [Veterans' Champion: Armed Forces Covenant Policy Development Report to Corporate Policy and Resources Committee, 26 February 2019](#)
- 8.2 [Scottish Government/UK Strategy for our Veterans, November 2018](#)
- 8.3 [Scottish Veterans Commissioner Positive Futures Getting Transition Right in Scotland, December 2020](#)

9. Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix One: Lord Provost's Commissioners/ Alternates
- 9.2 Appendix Two: Workshop Proposal 27 September 2019
- 9.3 Appendix Three: Workshop Contributors and Evidence Providers

Lord Provost's Commissioners/Alternates

Army

- 51X Deputy Commander Col Sandy Fitzpatrick
- Garrison Commander Edinburgh Castle Lt Col Hugo Clark
- Commanding Officers Scotland and Northern Ireland Personnel Recovery Unit:
 - Lt Col Warren Ginn
 - Lt Col James McMeechan
 - Major Heidi Macleod
- Senior Case Manager, Scotland & Northern Ireland Personnel Recovery Unit, Alisdair Sheail

Royal Navy

- Naval Regional Commander Scotland and Northern Ireland Captain Chris Smith
- Commander Gary Mills
- Major Peter Curtis
- Brigadier Andy Muddiman RM

Royal Air Force

- Air Vice Marshal Ross Paterson
- Squadron Leader Sohail Khan

Scottish Veterans' Commissioner

- Scottish Veterans' Commissioner Charlie Wallace
- Scottish Veterans Commissioner' Officer Rhona Dubery
- Policy Manager Alison Howard

City of Edinburgh Council

- Executive Director of Resources/Corporate Services, Dr Stephen Moir
- Lead Human Resources Consultant (Strategy), Steven Wright



THE STRATEGY FOR OUR EX FORCES PERSONNEL

LORD PROVOST'S COMMISSION: WORKSHOP PROPOSAL 27 SEPTEMBER 2019

Background

At its second meeting on 14 June 2019, the Lord Provost's Commission decided to focus on key issues facing Ex Forces Personnel in making the transition to civilian and civic life.

This work was to be progressed through a series of Workshops or Hearings themed initially around Housing, and Education/Employment.

Purpose

The purpose of the Workshops is to learn from experience and share information in order to identify gaps in provision and shape future policy and priorities for action.

Key stakeholders including statutory, third sector and service user interests will be invited to give evidence and to participate in Question and Answer sessions with the Commissioners.

This format will ensure that the Commissioners are briefed fully on current activity and well positioned to exert influence on emerging issues whilst also seeking to address existing needs.

An assigned rapporteur will analyse the evidence submitted and provide a report on each event, combining all of these findings in a final document and overall roadmap for Edinburgh.

This city-wide road map will be of use to all the agencies concerned and help to shape Edinburgh's long-term commitment to Ex Forces Personnel. It will also contribute strongly to promoting best practice and the "road testing" of the Scottish Government's "The Strategy for Our Veterans".

Workshop 1: Housing

Housing is to be the focus of the first Workshop with the overall aim of mapping the housing requirements and solutions for Ex Service Personnel in Edinburgh.

There is already considerable effort and deployment of significant resources on the part of service providers in tackling evident need in the city.

Statutory, third sector and user organisations are engaged in providing help and assistance and identifying future capacity requirements in the housing sector.

It is essential to capture as much information as possible from the City of Edinburgh Council and other key providers, to help join up the work of the various agencies and to ensure proper collaboration on any new initiatives.

Workshop Contributors and Evidence Providers

Date:	Theme:	Contributors:
9 December 2019	Housing Matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Housing Development, CEC• Veterans Housing Scotland• Defence Infrastructure Organisation
2 September 2020	Education, Training and Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strategy and Contracts, Capital City Partnership• Participation Officers, Napier University• Armed Forces Lead, Napier University• Skills Development Scotland
1 December 2020	Education, Training and Employment cont.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Careers Transition Partnership
16 March 2021	Health & Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lothian Veterans Centre• Veterans Welfare Service (part of Veterans UK)
19 May 2021	Health & Wellbeing cont. and Work of Charities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Veterans First Point• Thistle Foundation• Scottish Veterans Residencies• Fares 4 Free
27 September 2021	Lived Experience – participants from:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Veterans Housing Scotland• Lothians Veterans Centre• Thistle Organisation