

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

SPECIAL CABINET: 8 JULY 2009

SCOTTISH COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT ACTION PLAN – CELEBRATING SUCCESS: INSPIRING CHANGE

Report by the Chief Executive

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To advise the Cabinet on the Scottish Community Empowerment Action Plan and highlight issues from an East Ayrshire perspective.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In April 2008, the Scottish Government and COSLA announced a joint statement of commitment to community empowerment, setting Government at national and local level on a long term path to ensure that more communities become more empowered across the country.
- 2.2 This Action Plan builds on that statement and provides clarity on what community empowerment is; why community empowerment is important; and how communities become empowered. In addition, it sets out a range of new and existing practical actions which underpin the process of community empowerment. Taken together, these actions are designed to help everyone involved in community empowerment to deliver more empowered communities over the coming years. A copy of the Action Plan is available in the Members' Information Portal.

3. ROLES OF SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT, NATIONAL AND LOCAL

- 3.1 In relation to community empowerment, the Action Plan states that Government in Scotland has a shared role in providing strategic leadership to promote and support community empowerment.
- 3.2 At national level, the Scottish Government will ensure that the benefits of community empowerment are understood across its portfolios and that reference to the role community empowerment can play in achieving strategic objectives is made in appropriate policies.
- 3.3 The Scottish Government is investing around £2m in the wide ranging actions which will build capacity for empowerment in this Action Plan.
- 3.4 At local level, local authorities, in particular through their elected members, are seen to have a key role to play in promoting the benefits of community empowerment and engagement, in particular in articulating how communities themselves can help to deliver outcomes set out in Single Outcome Agreements.

- 3.5 In addition, the role of Councils in helping to drive a further culture shift which will see community empowerment as a process which can help to deliver a range of local outcomes and in continuing to support and develop the community groups which are the backbone of the community empowerment process is highlighted.
- 3.6 Within East Ayrshire, the Community Learning and Development has a key and lead role in this area, however, it is recognised that promoting community empowerment is an essential role of all services.
- 3.7 The Corporate Management Team has both considered and endorsed this report.

4. ROLES OF COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

- 4.1 The process of community empowerment relies on the existence of community organisations and support for the development of these organisations is a key focus for investing in community capacity building.
- 4.2 The Action Plan will focus on strengthening groups which are committed to equalities and connecting to their wider communities; ambitious and visionary; and take an energetic and enterprising approach to their work.

5. ROLES OF COMMUNITY PLANNING PARTNERSHIPS

- 5.1 In relation to community empowerment, the Action Plan states that Community Planning Partnerships can:
- promote and support joined up approaches to community capacity building as both the foundation of a sustainable approach to community empowerment and engagement, and a means to help communities work on their own issues; and
 - embed community empowerment throughout processes for community planning.
- 5.2 Examples of what is already being done in East Ayrshire in this regard include:
- Federations of Community Groups;
 - Local Community Planning Forums and the associated Reference Group;
 - Children and Young People's Forum and Equalities Networks and
 - 'Working Together Learning Together' Events.

6. COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT ACTIONS

Highlighting existing examples of community empowerment

- 6.1 The Government aims to get better at highlighting and celebrating existing examples of community empowerment. The purpose of this is to build enthusiasm for community empowerment and to show what can be achieved by empowered communities. Twelve examples from across Scotland are highlighted in the Community Empowerment Action Plan, including the Coalfield Communities Federation.

Development and implementation of a model scheme of establishment for community councils and a code of conduct for community councillors

- 6.2 The Model Scheme was developed by the Community Council Working Group (CCWG) with a view to the finalised Scheme providing a minimum basis for local authorities to adopt, should they wish to do so. This will allow for parity and greater consistency between Schemes and therefore, the operation of Community Councils, throughout Scotland. In East Ayrshire, this is being progressed by Democratic Services staff.

Support for communities to own assets

- 6.3 Resources will be invested in new work that will help to overcome some of the barriers to ensure that community asset ownership happens in a way that benefits communities.

Support for Local Councillors to support community empowerment

- 6.4 Working with the Local Government Improvement Service, the Scottish Government will fund a new training programme on community empowerment and engagement for elected members across the country, in recognition of the key role which they play in setting strategic direction locally, and promoting and supporting community empowerment.

Training to support community engagement and empowerment

- 6.5 At a National level, learning materials will be developed that will help to improve practice. This will build on the skills and competencies set out in Better Community Engagement - a framework for learning.
- 6.6 Community activists also benefit from learning at a national level and the evaluation of the previous Community Voices Network will be utilised to develop appropriate ways to increase local people's learning.

Investment to improve community capacity building

- 6.7 The Scottish Government is currently funding the development of comprehensive practice guidance for community capacity building, which will be published and disseminated in 2009. This guidance builds on a previous online resource guide and the Strengthening Scotland's Communities programme.

Participatory Budgeting pilot

- 6.8 The Scottish Government and COSLA will establish, by autumn 2009, a participatory budgeting pilot exercise focused on tackling Anti-Social behaviour across three Community Planning Partnership areas as part of the community empowerment agenda. Participatory budgeting should enable local community and neighbourhood groups to influence local action by helping to direct how small action funds are spent to develop solutions to local antisocial behaviour problems. This pilot exercise will be

supported by COSLA and the Scottish Government through the provision of training, guidance and match-funding.

Community Empowerment Programme - direct investment accessible by community groups

- 6.9 Since May 2007, the Scottish Government has put in place a range of new funding programmes and plans to continue and increase some existing funding streams to which community groups have access, including Wider Role Fund, Climate Challenge Fund, Scottish Rural Development Programme; Leader; Rural Priorities, Sportsmatch and Forestry for People Challenge Fund.
- 6.10 Taken together these funding streams total approximately £180m of Scottish Government and European funding over the three year period 2008-2011, a significant amount of potential direct investment in the work that communities want to do themselves.

7. NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND VOICE

- 7.1 During the dialogue process, there was a strong view that many communities simply wanted better opportunities to be heard by public sector bodies when they are planning and delivering services. Within East Ayrshire, we have a range of mechanism in place to ensure the community and voluntary sector are actively involved in decision making, from direct consultation via the Residents' Survey and Panel to more active engagement through the Local Community Planning Forums, Children and Young People's Forum and Equalities Networks.
- 7.2 The continuing importance of community engagement, as part of a spectrum of working with communities, is highlighted as is the need to promote the National Standards. The Standards have been recommended by Audit Scotland as good practice and have been the subject of a recent positive evaluation of their impact. National Standards awareness raising and training sessions were provided to community representatives and Community Planning Partners in East Ayrshire.
- 7.3 The Scottish Government and COSLA are also investing £250k over two years for the development and promotion of the VOiCE community engagement database. It can be used to support a range of participation from overall area regeneration to specific concerns of users of particular services. Within East Ayrshire, a refresher/awareness session relating to the National Standards and VOiCE will be offered to a range of stakeholders by December 2009.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

9. COMMUNITY PLANNING/POLICY/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Effective community engagement lies at the heart of the Community Planning process in East Ayrshire and building the capacity of community representatives is fundamental

to ensuring embedded and sustained community ownership of the Community Plan and the SOA.

9.2 The Scottish Community Empowerment Action Plan highlights the role of Community Planning Partnerships in relation to community empowerment and engagement.

10. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

10.1 All services have a role in supporting community empowerment, although it is recognised that the Community Learning and Development Service has a key and lead role in this area. Community capacity building is one of three priorities set for the service nationally and therefore to ensure that all three priorities remain a focus the service will require to deliver a proportionate approach to community empowerment within the resources available.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 Cabinet is requested to:

- (i) note the range of work nationally and locally being progressed to promote wider community engagement.

Fiona Lees
Chief Executive
29 June 2009

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Scottish Community Empowerment Action Plan – Celebrating Success: Inspiring Change
East Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership, Single Outcome Agreement, 2008 – 2011

Any person wishing to inspect the above background papers or seek further information on this report should contact Gwen Barker, Community Planning and Partnership Manager (Tel: 01563 554602).

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