

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEETING: 4 DECEMBER 2008

UPDATE ON CABINET ACTIVITIES

Report by Leader of the Council

1. INTRODUCTION

As 2008 draws to a close, and another busy period for the Council comes to an end, I'm pleased to present to Council my third six monthly report on the activities of the Cabinet. Once again it has been a challenging period, but it has also been one of considerable progress, so let me describe some of the achievements, and some of the issues considered by Cabinet during that time.

2. DEVELOPING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 2.1** The Local Community Planning Forums, which I described in my last report to Council, continue to be extremely successful. In August, all four Forums met to talk about Community Safety and Anti-Social Behaviour. This was an exceptionally successful event which tackled issues that are important for all our communities. Under consideration were such matters as alcohol and drug related anti-social behaviour, fire home safety, dog fouling and job creation. The associated actions arising from the Forums will give the Council and our Community Planning Partners several challenges!
- 2.2** An "Equalities Event" was held in July, its theme was "Working Together". This gave our communities the opportunity to find out about equality issues, to express their concerns and to set the agenda for the Equalities Forum which took place in September. The Forum was particularly successful; a presentation was given on transport and training and support for forum members was also discussed. Preparations are already underway for the next Forum to be held in February 2009.
- 2.3** The first meeting of the Children and Young People's Forum Representative Group was held on 26 September 2008 in Shortlees Community Centre to discuss "Stereotyping of Young People". The event was well attended by young people who represented our local schools and youth forums. They identified key issues to be taken forward in the first instance by the Executive Group who met on 14 November to agree an action plan and timescales. The next meeting of the Children and Young People's Forum Representative Group is scheduled for tomorrow when members will consider Personal and Community Safety.

3. LIFELONG LEARNING

3.1 East Ayrshire Educational Services Accessibility Strategy

3.1.1 Under the banner of Lifelong Learning, Cabinet has recently approved a three year Accessibility Strategy for children and young people who have a disability. The strategy covers three main areas for children and young people attending schools. These are:

- improved access to the curriculum;
- improved access to the physical environment of the school; and
- improving communication with the children and young people attending school.

3.1.2 The challenges of the previous accessibility strategy have largely been met. Some of the more significant achievements include:

- the establishment of the Loudoun Academy Communications Centre for children with autistic spectrum disorder;
- putting in place Individual Learning Plans for the children;
- issuing procedural practice and guidance to promote inclusion;
- establishing transition guidelines for children with additional support needs from P7 to S1; and,
- ensuring all new build schools are fully accessible.

3.2 Community Accessibility Strategy

3.2.1 *Management of Sports and Leisure Facilities at Grange and St Joseph's Academies*

Extensive new indoor sports and leisure facilities are now available for community use at Grange Academy and St Joseph's Academy, following the completion of the new schools. The development of leisure facilities was a key element during the design stage of the new school facilities, and getting full use of them is now vital. It is hoped that these first class facilities will assist aspiring competitors for the forthcoming Olympics and Glasgow Commonwealth Games.

The Council has ensured that the leisure facilities are available from 5pm until 10pm on Monday to Friday and from 9am until 4pm, Saturday and Sunday throughout the year. An activity programme will be developed to maximise public use, promote sports development and accommodate school events which are held out of school hours. These facilities will be further enhanced by the creation of two full size floodlit synthetic grass pitches in August 2009, which will be managed by Leisure Services, with players using the changing rooms provided in the new school buildings.

3.3 East Ayrshire Child Protection Business Plan

3.3.1 The Child Protection Committee Business Plan has responded to the findings contained within Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education Inspection of services to protect children and young people in the East Ayrshire area. It is now set over a three year period to run concurrently with the Children and Young Persons' Service Plan and Domestic Abuse Action Plan, thereby better integrating the work of the Child Protection Committee with universal and targeted provision. Cabinet, at its October meeting, also noted, in terms of the Child Protection Business Plan 2007-08, the excellent progress made against all key priorities.

3.4 Other Educational Projects

3.4.1 Cabinet has given its support to a number of multi-agency, government funded, Educational projects.

- **Active Schools**

SportScotland have confirmed that they will continue to support the Active Schools Programme and will invest over £70,000 over the next three years, from 2008 to 2011. The main aims of this programme are:

- to build a sustainable volunteer network;
- to provide opportunities for all children and young people to participate in physical activity and sport,
- to create 'pathways' from the school to the community; and
- to increase participation amongst 'hard to reach groups' by adopting a targeted approach.

The Scottish Government recognise that Active Schools is having a positive effect throughout Scotland and that it is clearly contributing to helping pupils meet the recommended daily activity levels of 60 minutes accumulated activity per day. Decisions about all future government funding will be made at the next spending review in 2011.

- **Determined to Succeed, Enterprise in Education**

Funding has been allocated to support the development of Determined to Succeed - Enterprise in Education, until March 2011, and a revised staffing structure has been approved to take the programme forward. The main aims of the programme are:-

- to ensure that all pupils will experience Enterprise in Education;
- to provide quality staff development opportunities;
- to strengthen its partnerships with business and commerce;
- to provide innovative curricular approaches to Enterprise in Education; and,
- to support schools in embedding enterprising and creative learning and teaching methods into the curriculum.

4. COMMUNITY WELLBEING

4.1 Policy and Procedures for Looked After Children

- 4.1.1** Moving on to Community Wellbeing, and to one of the most important topics we have dealt with. East Ayrshire currently has 472 looked after children. Of these, some 130 or more are 'Looked After and Accommodated' by the Council. These children could be placed with foster carers, or in one of the Council's children's homes.

The Council as a Corporate Parent has responsibility for these children, and we place the highest possible priority on discharging this duty. An extensive piece of work has been completed involving staff from Social Work, Education and partner agencies to develop a range of policies and procedures for looked after children.

Arrangements are in hand for the holding of a Corporate Parenting Event for Elected Members in mid-January and consideration is currently being given both to site options for a new children's home, and to investigate the future arrangements for our provision of residential social care. Recommendations will be considered by Cabinet by the end of the year.

4.2 Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) Pre-Referral Group

- 4.2.1** The Council has established a multi-agency pre-referral group to consider early information about cases of children potentially at risk. This approach had been adopted by a small number of other local authorities in Scotland and the remit and working arrangements are based on identified best practice.

Both the Child Protection Committee and the Chief Officers' Group identified the merits of this approach following discussions around a current Significant Case Review. This highlighted the range of multi-agency involvement in individual cases, and how much early discussion across the agencies on cases of this type could bring immediate benefits. The approach is also seen as potentially addressing some of the pressures in frontline services, by more effective use of vetting, and allocation of resources.

4.2.2 The group has met on a number of occasions since its first meeting in June, and early feedback has been very positive, with all agencies commenting favourably on the progress to date.

4.2.3 A significant number of the cases referred to the group highlight alcohol as a key contributing factor, the Community Planning Partnership has been successful in securing £750k over the next three years to tackle alcohol related activity within East Ayrshire. Approximately £233k of this will be used to support the overall development of the pre-referral group and establish a rapid response to alcohol related referrals.

4.2.4 The establishment of the group is initially for a six month pilot period to monitor its effectiveness, and a final review will take place by the end of the year.

4.3 Performance Inspection of Social Work Services in East Ayrshire Council

4.3.1 East Ayrshire Council's Social Work Services are currently being inspected by the Social Work Inspection Agency (SWIA). SWIA carry out performance inspections of all Scotland's Local Authority Social Work Services. Inspectors gather and analyse a range of information before publishing a report identifying strengths and areas for improvement.

The inspection started on 30 June 2008, the file reading phase started in October, with interviews scheduled for late November. A draft report is due in the Spring, with final publication in the Summer of 2009.

The Cabinet will review the report on the results of this important inspection at a future date.

4.3.2 The aging population profile throughout Scotland, which is expanding the need for care services both within a community setting and within appropriate accommodation, has resulted in a need to examine the sustainability of Social Services within East Ayrshire. This is a vital piece of work and I will report back to you once officers have completed their review and produced their recommendations.

4.4 Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007

4.4.1 Cabinet were advised of progress in the implementation of the Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007.

The Act has been developed to better protect adults at risk of abuse and the main provisions of the Act are:

- a new power of right of entry to settings where abuse of adults is thought to be taking place;

- the creation of banning orders so that perpetrators of abuse are removed from those settings; and,
- to establish statutory adult protection committees, operating on a multi-agency basis, to further develop strategic inter-agency working and collaboration.

4.4.2 Cabinet agreed to establish the East Ayrshire Adult Protection Committee and to extend the terms of reference for the existing Child Protection Chief Officers' Group. This is chaired by the Chief Executive and includes the Chief Executive of the Health Service and the Divisional Commander, Strathclyde Police. The group's purpose is to direct and support the Adult Protection Committee's activities.

4.5 Leisure and Cultural Strategy Consultation

4.5.1 In September, Cabinet authorised a consultation on East Ayrshire's Draft Leisure and Cultural Strategy. This strategy is the culmination of a process lasting several years and is a result of changes to legislation. It has been developed in partnership with colleagues from various services within the Council and will dovetail with the new corporate service plans and the performance management system. The consultation consists of two parts. The first is a general overview of leisure and culture, showing why they are important and what drives the services. It highlights where leisure can demonstrate partnership working and meet targets, such as improving health and lowering crime statistics, and it sets out the key aims for leisure and culture over the next three years.

4.5.2 The second part contains action plan targets with delivery partners, and shows strategic links with the Community Plan and other linked plans. The consultation adopts a number of methods to obtain as wide a variety of views as possible, including online consultation and focus groups. This is in addition to publishing the draft strategy and seeking views by conventional means on where value can be added.

4.5.3 The consultation process ran for a period of six weeks from 1 October until 12 November 2008. Amendments can now be made to reflect the views of respondents and the final document will be submitted to Cabinet for approval early in the new year.

5. COMMUNITY PLANNING AND EQUALITIES

5.1 Single Outcome Agreement

5.1.1 Our Community Planning Partnership continues to thrive, and to deliver excellent results for the area. Following the signing of the Community Planning Partnership Single Outcome Agreement in June, next year we will submit an interim report in April and in September in each of the following years, covering both the year just finished and the plans for the year to come.

5.2 East Ayrshire Community Planning Process - 2007/08 Annual Performance Report

5.2.1 As Members will know the Community Plan Review Supplement and six new thematic Action Plans were approved by the Community Planning Core Partners' Group on 2 March 2007, as a result of the findings of the four yearly review process.

5.2.2 In July, Cabinet received performance information which related to the six thematic Action Plans and the actions contained within the Community Planning Joint Officers' Group Work Plan for 2007-08. All Community Planning related tasks that needed to be taken forward during 2007/08 have been. A number of residual and ongoing tasks have been carried over into the 2008/09 Work Plan.

During 2007/08, across the six Action Plans, there were 240 planned outputs. Of these outputs, 217 or over 90% were fully, largely or partially achieved.

For example, business advice was delivered to over 1200 East Ayrshire businesses, and 228 business start-ups were achieved, while in tackling fuel poverty, over 500 households were provided with advice and assistance. In terms of further assistance, a total of 1,026 contacts were made by the Joint Council and DWP Team, resulting in 966 effective visits being undertaken, with 673 successful benefit claims subsequently being progressed and 368 people being referred on for additional services. Over £1.3m has been generated for older people through the work of the Joint Team and a report will be submitted to Cabinet on 17 December 2008, taking this important work forward.

5.2.3 As a result of the decision by the Community Planning Partnership Board of 26 June 2008 to move from six thematic action plans to four, work is progressing to have the new action plans in place and operating by 1 April 2009. The new action plans are as follows:

- Promoting Lifelong Learning
- Delivering Community Regeneration
- Improving Community Safety
- Improving Health and Wellbeing.

5.3 East Ayrshire Community Planning Residents' Survey 2008

5.3.1 Earlier this year a survey of 2,000 East Ayrshire residents was conducted, giving us an increased understanding of local priorities and the views of residents on public service provision/satisfaction. The data will inform the ongoing review and development of our Community Plan Thematic Action Plans and the Single Outcome Agreement. The survey will be carried out every three years to allow us to establish future trends.

5.4 Community Planning Alcohol and Drugs Pledge and National Consultation on Scottish Government's Alcohol Strategy

5.4.1 Following a Community Planning event in November 2007 on drugs and alcohol use in East Ayrshire, Community Planning Partners resolved to step up our efforts to tackle substance abuse in the period 2008 to 10 through a 'Community Planning Pledge.'

5.4.2 During consultation, both then and later, it became clear that there was significant concern around the risk to children and young people from alcohol and drugs. In particular, statistical evidence suggested that those young people most vulnerable were in the 13-15 year old age group. Preventative work to address this issue is part of the Work Plan related to the Community Planning pledge. As identified previously, £750,000 over a three year period has been allocated to the Community Planning Partnership from NHS Ayrshire and Arran Health Board to help combat alcohol misuse.

6. ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION

6.1 Regeneration Projects and Budget Allocations

6.1.1 To address the agreed regeneration priorities identified by both the Council and the Community Planning Partnership, a wide range of projects are currently being progressed. Settlements throughout East Ayrshire are now benefiting from a range of community, heritage and environmental projects, being carried under the umbrella of the Restoring Communities Programme (RCP).

6.1.2 Some highlights of the RCP include the switching on of a new architectural floodlighting scheme for the B-listed Kilmarnock viaduct, the completion of a community fish hatchery as part of the Catrine Environmental Heritage Project, the commissioning of an ongoing feasibility study into the potential options for the former Darvel co-op building or its site and the development of a series of community gardens in Auchinleck.

6.2 Kilmarnock

6.2.1 Within the John Finnie Street and Bank Street Outstanding Conservation Area, a Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) is fully up and running, whilst the Heritage Lottery Fund have now formally approved funding for a Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI). The development of a boutique hotel and retail arcade on the former Opera House site for which a full planning application has now been submitted will be supported by both the CARS and THI, whilst the CARS has supported the completion of the first shop-front improvement project at 95 John Finnie Street and will support the conversion of the

Johnnie Walker building on Strand Street to office accommodation, work on which is due to commence imminently.

- 6.2.2** In addition to the regeneration projects, cabinet has agreed that revised proposals for Council office accommodation be prepared to take account of the decision regarding the top of the town office development. Alternative plans are now being considered, which sit firmly within the context of the Kilmarnock town centre strategy.

6.3 Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) for Cumnock Conservation Area

- 6.3.1** Cabinet has agreed to submit a bid to Historic Scotland for grant assistance to establish a Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme for Cumnock Conservation Area. A consultancy team has been appointed to prepare the information required at a maximum cost of £50,000. This will be led by a RIAS accredited architect with specialist knowledge and experience in relation to listed building repairs, and Historic Scotland's grant requirements

6.4 Galston Town Centre Regeneration

- 6.4.1** Cabinet also agreed to take forward a Regeneration Strategy for Galston Town Centre as part of the Restoring Communities Programme, with the aim of delivering on the ground improvements to the benefit of the Town Centre and the wider Galston community. This includes the refurbishment of the existing Council accommodation at 7-9 and 11 Cross Street, Galston.

6.4 Homecoming 2009: Event Programme

- 6.4.1** The National Event Programme for Homecoming 2009 was announced on 16 June this year when the schedule was officially launched by the First Minister. The programme contains several events to be staged in Ayrshire and whilst details of funding awarded to each event have not been made public, all events in the final programme will receive financial and / or marketing support from EventScotland, the Homecoming 2009 organisers.

- 6.4.2** The Council will receive £20,000 to support two exhibitions to be held at the Dick Institute entitled 'Creative Burns' and 'Ayrshire Innovators.' This funding falls short of the amount applied for (£50,000) however contributions from Enterprise Ayrshire and the Council's own funds will ensure that high quality exhibitions and associated events are staged. In addition, the Scottish National Portrait Gallery has agreed to loan five iconic portraits for display in the Dick Institute during October 2009. The five paintings will reflect the five pillars of the Homecoming.

- 6.4.3** Mauchline Burns Club have been successful with applications for three events; the Mauchline Plough Match (March); the Holy Fair (May); and the Mauchline Homecoming Marquee (July).
- 6.4.4** In association with Ulster/Scots Agency, the Ulster Folk Orchestra are staging an event at the Palace Theatre, Kilmarnock in May. Because children from East Ayrshire Schools have already taken part in previous events with the Orchestra as part of an exchange visit, it is likely that local schools will again be participating in this event.
- 6.4.5** The Burns Monument will be formally opened during the year of the Homecoming and early planning for this event has commenced.
- 6.4.6** We have also invited our twin towns to visit East Ayrshire in May 2009 to celebrate the Homecoming and positive responses have been received from Kulmbach, Santa Coloma, and Joué-les-Tours, as well as Kilmarnock, Virginia, USA.
- 6.4.7** We will also be inviting the Provost and Mayors of Councils in the South of Scotland, North of England and the North of Ireland, to visit East Ayrshire during Homecoming.
- 6.4.8** The Council's Homecoming programme will be launched on Monday 1 December 2008.

6.5 Park Development Programme

- 6.5.1** As Members will be aware, Cabinet approved expenditure of £200,000 on a Park Development Programme, with £170,000 initially allocated to Kay Park in Kilmarnock and £30,000 to be used to address health and safety issues in other parks.
- 6.5.2** The planned programme of improvement works in Kay Park will enhance its attractiveness, add to the facilities on offer and will complement the works being carried out at the Burns Monument Centre. It will include new play equipment, improvements to the gateway to the park on Strawberrybank Road, upgrading of the tree lined avenue from the lake up to the Burns Monument Centre, new artwork and new litter bins and benches.
- 6.5.3** The Burns Monument Centre is due to be handed over to the Council before the end of the year with the final fit out to be completed in January 2009. The building is on target to open, for business, by the end of January 2009, with an official opening being planned for this Summer, 2009. The quality of the building is superb and congratulations are due to the team in Finance and Asset Management who have designed it and managed the project.

7. MANAGEMENT AND RESOURCES

7.1 Best Value Service Reviews

7.1.1 Best Value Service Reviews were undertaken in Information Technology Services and Personnel Services. Cabinet endorsed amendments to staffing structures within both Departments which had arisen as a result of recommendations from the reviews.

7.1.2 A Cross Cutting Best Value Service Review of East Ayrshire Council's Property Maintenance Arrangements, which included Housing, Property and Building and Works, has also been carried out. The Cabinet has approved the findings of the review and has sought a report from the Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services in January 2009, setting out options and recommendations for utilising the HRA funding resource of £1.5 million, which will become available as a result of this important review.

7.2 Recruitment and Selection - Procurement of Assessment Centre Provision

7.2.1 Cabinet agreed to appoint the Keil Centre Ltd, for a period of 12 months, as part of the Council's overall recruitment and selection arrangements. The Keil Centre Ltd has been used to assist in the recruitment of a number of Heads of Services posts, most recently the two posts of Head of Children, Families and Criminal Justice and the Head of Community Care. This development further strengthens our arrangements for recruitment and selection of quality candidates to key posts.

7.3 Audit and Financial Statements for 2007/08

7.3.1 The Cabinet and the Governance and Scrutiny Committee have received and considered another excellent report from its External Auditors, Audit Scotland.

For example, the report stated:

*"We have given an **unqualified** opinion on the financial statements of the East Ayrshire Council. The Council dealt well with significant changes in the format of the accounts."*

and,

"The Council recycled 41.8% of its municipal waste during the year. This was a considerable achievement and confirms East Ayrshire Council as one of the leading recycling councils in Scotland."

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1** As I said at the beginning of this update, we have had a busy six months. We are forging ahead with Community Planning Forums and addressing the equalities agenda in the most positive way possible.
- 8.2** Within schools, we are ensuring access to both the curriculum and the physical environment for those who have a disability. We are providing sports and leisure facilities for the whole community at our new schools, and we are investing in both the physical and intellectual development of all children with the Active Schools and Determined to Succeed initiatives.
- 8.3** Both child and vulnerable adult protection continue to be priorities, and are directed by the most senior officers in the Council and our community partners.
- 8.4** The impact of our regeneration plans is now being seen across East Ayrshire, and we will use Homecoming 2009 to add impetus and energy to this vital task next year.
- 8.5** Finally, I wish to thank all elected members of East Ayrshire Council for the positive way this Council operates. In Cabinet, in Governance and Scrutiny, and in Council, I greatly appreciate the constructive participation of all Elected Members. I would also take the opportunity to wish all Elected Members and employees of East Ayrshire Council the compliments of the season and look forward to working with them in 2009 in building on this success in the future.