

## **EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

### **COUNCIL MEETING: 6 DECEMBER 2007**

#### **Report by Leader of the Council**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1** From the Statutory Meeting of Council held on 17 May, to the most recent Cabinet Meeting on 21 November 2007, six exciting months have passed in the life of the new Council in East Ayrshire at the time of writing this report. Under the new decision-making structure, provision exists within Standing Orders for the Leader of the Council to submit to Council on a regular basis, a report on the activities of the Cabinet, and to provide the opportunity for every Member of East Ayrshire Council to put a question to me about the report. It is my intention to submit such a report to Council at its meetings in December and June of each year.

#### **2. NEW COUNCIL: NEW DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE**

- 2.1** Following the Statutory Meeting of Council on 17 May, we now have a new look Council with:-

- a new Provost;
- a new Administration; and
- a new decision-making structure.

- 2.2** East Ayrshire Council has introduced a new decision-making structure, based on a Cabinet system, with portfolio holders reflecting a thematic approach that will focus on the Council's Community Planning themes, aims and aspirations. This thematic approach will assist in co-ordinating policy development and will promote cross-departmental working and inter-agency partnership working.

- 2.3** I believe our Cabinet system will:-

- increase the transparency of decision making;
- increase the accountability of the leadership;
- streamline Council business; and,
- put greater emphasis on a strategic approach to planning.

- 2.4** As part of the new decision making-structure, a Governance and Scrutiny Committee, chaired by a Member of the Opposition, has been established. This Committee is tasked with holding the Cabinet to account and providing open and systematic scrutiny of Officers with regular challenge on performance.

- 2.5** Excellent progress has been made in this area with new Governance and Scrutiny guidelines and Call-in procedures developed. The

Committee has already embarked on a review of the Waste Recycling Policy/Technical Evaluation of the Kerbside Recycling Scheme, as well as dealing with the first Call-in of a Cabinet decision in respect of the Council's Windfarm Policy.

- 2.6** In its most recent report to Members on the Audit of Accounts for 2006/07, Audit Scotland recognised that the formation of the Governance and Scrutiny Committee was an extremely significant development. As Leader of the Council and Chair of the Cabinet, I welcome the constructive, robust and purposeful challenge that the Committee will provide, which can only enhance the transparency and vigour of decision making within East Ayrshire.
- 2.7** Following the introduction of larger multi-member wards, the final element in the review of the Council's decision-making structure was to review the structure of Local Committees. The Council also realised that this also gave us an opportunity to further develop community involvement in both the Community Planning process and Council/Partner Agency Services. The Council embarked on a consultation exercise and a report on proposals will be presented to Council for consideration at its meeting on 6 December 2007.
- 2.8** Our approach is one of common sense and we have sought to build upon what has worked, whilst putting in place the arrangements to secure improvements for our communities in the longer term.
- 2.9** The remainder of my report is presented along the lines of the Cabinet Portfolio arrangements.

### **3. LIFELONG LEARNING**

#### **3.1 Free School Meal Trial P1 to P3 Primary Schools**

- 3.1.1** The Cabinet welcomed East Ayrshire Council's inclusion as one of five Local Authorities chosen to pilot the Scottish Government's Free School Meals Project. During the six month period, which commenced in October 2007, the project will see free school meals offered to every Primary 1 through to Primary 3 pupil across the Council. The project is aimed at developing better eating habits for children from an early age, and in turn creating a healthier Scotland. The project links closely with East Ayrshire Council's approach to promoting healthy eating within its schools.

#### **3.2 School Estate Management Plan 2007**

- 3.2.1** At its first meeting on 22 August 2007, the Cabinet considered the most recent School Estate Management Plan. Within this Plan it was recognised that a significant surplus capacity existed within schools. Cabinet noted that it was a priority for the Department of Educational and Social Services to address this matter, understanding that surplus

property is a drain on resources that restricts the Department's flexibility to deal with priority estate-related matters.

### **3.3 Better Schools: Better Learning: A Strategy for Developing the School Estate**

**3.3.1** More recently, the Cabinet considered a report by the Executive Director of Educational and Social Services and agreed to start a consultation exercise in terms of the "Better Schools: Better Learning Strategy for Developing the School Estate", which seeks to improve and strengthen school education, particularly in rural areas, by creating viable educational communities that will endure into the future. Our aim is to teach our young people in high quality, modern accommodation, and with an in-built capacity to deliver, develop and strengthen curricular provision. The consultation process is underway, and the Cabinet will give full consideration to the results of this consultation exercise early in 2008

### **3.4 Other Educational Projects**

**3.4.1** The Cabinet has also given its support to a number of multi-agency, Government funded projects, and I have highlighted five of these below:

- **The further Development of the 'Active Schools' programme in East Ayrshire has four key aims. These are to:**
  - build a sustainable volunteer network;
  - provide opportunities for all children and young people to participate in physical activity and sport to enable the creation of pathways from the school to the community;
  - increase participation amongst "hard to reach groups" by adopting a targeted approach; and,
  - embed effective integration, planning, management and delivery of Active Schools within East Ayrshire.
  
- **The 'Determined to Succeed, Enterprise in Education' initiative seeks to continue the development of Enterprise in Education across all schools within East Ayrshire which will:**
  - ensure that all pupils will experience Enterprise in Education;
  - provide quality staff development opportunities;
  - strengthen its partnerships with business and commerce;
  - provide innovative curricular approaches to Enterprise in Education; and,
  - support schools in their aim of embedding enterprising and creative learning and teaching methodologies into the curriculum.

- **The Youth Music Initiative and Cultural Co-ordinators in Scottish Schools Programme:**
  - will focus on developing programmes of work including a wide variety of cultural and artistic experiences, enhancing the lives of young people, offering continued professional development opportunities for staff, and supporting a Curriculum for Excellence.
- **We are delighted with the success of the Ulster-Scottish Partnership Project - “Robert Burns - The Jolly Beggars.”**
  - Following on from the success of a recent cultural partnership project with the Ulster-Scottish Agency, which offered opportunities for East Ayrshire’s young people to enhance their creative thinking and inter-personal skills, as well as sharing their own cultural heritage with pupils from another country, further exciting initiatives are on the horizon. Future plans include the development of an enterprise link with Ballydown Primary School and new links between East Ayrshire Schools Scottish Traditional Saturday Morning Centre and the Ulster-Scottish Traditional Music Programme.
- **Expanding Global Links for our Schools**
  - The development of international links with Catalonia for schools in the Stewarton Learning Partnership, is an innovative and exciting project that will contribute to the development of our young people.

#### **4. COMMUNITY WELLBEING**

##### **4.1 Campus Police Officers**

**4.1.1** Cabinet approved the introduction of a new Community Planning Initiative working in partnership with Strathclyde Police, the Community Planning Partnership, and the Community Safety Partnership. Three Campus Police Officers will be based at Grange Academy, Loudoun Academy and Auchinleck Academy. However, they will have a wider responsibility for the learning partnership and the community in which they serve, and will play an important role in the promotion of Community Safety in schools and in the wider community.

##### **4.2 A New Children’s Home in Kilmarnock**

**4.2.1** One of the priority projects for the Cabinet in 2008/09 will be the replacement of the existing Children’s Home in Kilmarnock. The 2004 Best Value Review for Looked After & Accomodated Children identified

the need to replace the existing home, and the Cabinet has requested a feasibility report on alternatives to be brought back for early consideration in 2008.

### **4.3 Homecoming 2009**

**4.3.1** Scotland's Year of Homecoming 2009 is a Scottish Government lead initiative aimed at attracting thousands of visitors to Scotland by showcasing Scotland as a "must visit, must return" destination to a world-wide audience. The events will take place throughout 2009, the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Robert Burns' birth.

**4.3.2** Proposals for a local Homecoming Event Programme are currently being produced by officers of the Council around the themes of:

**"Come to the home of: .....** **Robert Burns**  
..... **Enlightenment and Innovation**  
..... **Golf**  
..... **Whisky**  
..... **Your Ancestors"**

Early in 2008, the Cabinet will start the planning process to confirm the local Programme, ensuring that East Ayrshire is in a position to secure the benefits that will come from this major initiative. We will seek to build on the Council's strengths, and will aim to stimulate local, national, and international interest in the area.

### **4.4 Inspections**

**4.4.1** There have been two major Inspections / Audits carried out in Council since the summer.

- The Joint Inspection of Services to Protect Children and Young People has concluded, and the final report is expected shortly. Clearly the Council and its partners will focus on those areas that require improvement, however early feedback from the Chief Inspector has described the outcome as "a very good report."
- The Inspection of Housing Services will be concluded early in the New Year, and we look forward to its findings.

## **5. ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION**

**5.1** The regeneration of Kilmarnock Town Centre and Cumnock Town Centre are key priorities for East Ayrshire Council and significant progress has been made over the past few months.

**5.2** The Cabinet intends to consider the development of a strategic framework for the regeneration of other East Ayrshire communities (a 'Whole Town' approach), and will seek proposals for the adoption of

this approach in the future. Further, the Cabinet will give consideration to proposals to work with our Community Planning Partners to implement a mechanism for the preparation and implementation of a Whole Town strategy for New Cumnock as a pilot, with a view to rolling out the process in future years.

### **5.3 Top of the Town and Public Realm Works**

It is anticipated that construction works on a major office development will commence before the end of the financial year and Cabinet has approved the capital expenditure of £4m from the Regeneration, Efficiency and Asset Management budget which includes refurbishing the multi-storey car-park; construction of a new off-site car park at High Street to service the new office development; creation of a pedestrian link between the new car-park and new office development; public realm refurbishment works; and the purchase of additional properties to aid the regeneration proposals.

The Council's Finance and Asset Management Service will be taking some of the space, and this will bring staff currently based in Lugar and the Greenholm area of Kilmarnock into the town centre with the consequential boost to the town centre economy and viability. The developer is confident of attracting other tenants to lease the remaining space once the office is available.

### **5.4 Site of Former Opera House, 14/16 John Finnie Street, Kilmarnock and 24-26 Strand Street, Kilmarnock**

The Cabinet also gained approval from the Scottish Government for a Compulsory Purchase Order to progress the development of this site by the majority landowner, for a hotel with retail provision and an associated heritage facility. The Council is currently involved in further negotiations to acquire ownership of additional adjoining properties at this location in order to facilitate an even more extensive development than was originally proposed. These plans will be underpinned by further use of statutory Compulsory Purchasing Order powers where appropriate.

### **5.5 Kilmarnock Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS)**

**5.5.1** The CARS Scheme was launched on 30 May 2007. The Cabinet recently increased the Council's contribution to the fund by £500,000 in recognition of the level of expenditure for CARS project to reinstate the historical architectural aspects of buildings being brought back into use,. This brought the total funding package to £2,248,170. Further, the Cabinet has now approved the CARS grant approval process and has provided authority to the Head of Planning and Economic Development to approve, within certain perimeters, grant applications for priority buildings and to approve CARS small grant applications up to £25,000.

## **5.6 Kilmarnock Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI)**

- 5.6.1** In order to help secure the THI funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Cabinet recently confirmed the Council's commitment to the Scheme by approving an additional contribution of £500,000. This brought the minimum anticipated grant allocation to £3,206,000. The Cabinet has also recently approved the Kilmarnock Townscape Heritage Initiative Stage 2 bid.
- 5.6.2** The CARS Scheme and the THI Scheme along with the Town Centre Living Initiative will combine to create an overarching heritage project which will support ***shopping in the Town Centre***, by improving the facade and fabric of the town shops; ***living in the town***, by creating new flatted accommodations; and ***working in the town***, by creating new office space.
- 5.6.3** The Town Centre Strategy also aims to improve accessibility into and within the town centre. Funding has been secured to install new parking signage which will inform drivers of the availability of parking spaces within the town's car-parks. Pedestrian signage has also been installed throughout the town centre to increase awareness of nearby facilities. As part of the Town Centre Strategy, a key Council priority is to address the number of vacant and derelict buildings within the town. The Council is currently approaching owners and taking enforcement action when necessary.

## **5.7 East Ayrshire's Parks**

- 5.7.1** Our parks are a major part of our heritage and are important local amenities, and as such, we have a duty to continually maintain and improve the visitor's experience. We have plans in place to increase grass-cutting, litter collection and general maintenance; to improve the signage, lighting and general security; to replace fences, gates, seating and play equipment; and to replace catering facilities, and entertainment and sports facilities. New and extensive lighting has already been installed in Howard Park, Kay Park and Annanhill, Kilmarnock.
- 5.7.2** All of the above will build on the work carried out in the summer through the highly successful 'Pick a Park' initiative. This project has involved significant numbers of local volunteers, and helps further develop a sense of local togetherness and civic pride. To date, 'Pick a Park' has visited Woodroad Park in Cumnock, Howard, Annanhill and Kay Parks in Kilmarnock as well as various locations in Dalmellington.

## **5.8 Cumnock Town Centre Heritage Initiative**

- 5.8.1** Proposals for the Cumnock Town Centre Regeneration Project are continuing to develop, and the Cumnock Town Centre Liaison Forum

has been established. The Liaison Forum, chaired by a representative from the business community, comprises eight representatives of the *wider* business community in Cumnock Town Centre together with four Elected Members representing East Ayrshire Council.

**5.8.2** The Cabinet recently approved the Council's participation in a proposed joint venture with a development partner for the regeneration of Cumnock Town Centre. In addition, the Cabinet has also agreed to the appointment of commercial property advisers to undertake the management of the Glaisnock Shopping Centre in Cumnock for a two year period.

**5.8.3** As the proposals for the Cumnock Town Centre Regeneration Project continue to progress, the Cabinet recognises the importance this regeneration project will have in bringing to the area enhanced shopping facilities and employment opportunities.

**5.8.4** The Council supported the initial bid to save Dumfries House and are now working closely with the Trust and their newly appointed Chief Executive, Mike Shafer, on plans to substantially increase public access to the Estate, a real local and national treasure. We are determined to maximise the potential of the development of both Dumfries Estate and the new eco development / neighbourhood proposed on the land between Cumnock and Auchinleck, being taken forward by The Princes Foundation for the Built Environment.

**5.8.5** On 29 November 2007 a member / officer group visited Poundbury, an experimental 'new' village on the outskirts of Dorchester which has adopted a sustainable and community-based town planning ethos. This study visit helped the group appreciate the philosophy underpinning the development, the true scale of the undertaking, and the enormous opportunity that awaits our Council.

## **5.9 Developer Contributions**

**5.9.1** The Cabinet have recognised that the levels of investment required in infrastructure, education, transportation, amenities and facilities, as a direct result of the anticipated growth in housing development, are likely to be significant. It was agreed, therefore, that development contributions should be dealt with at a strategic level.

**5.9.2** The Cabinet have recognised that developers' contributions must be linked to the original project that initiated the contribution. To this end, we have established four developer contribution funds reflecting the core area and investment corridors identified in the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan, and the emerging East Ayrshire Local Plan, namely:

- Core Area (Kilmarnock);
- Glasgow Link Investment Corridor (Stewarton, Kilmaurs, Dunlop and Fenwick);

- Irvine Valley Investment Corridor (Galston, Newmilns and Darvel); and,
- M74 link/Doon Valley Investment Corridor (Mauchline, Auchinleck, Cumnock, New Cumnock, Dalrymple, Patna, Dalmellington and Muirkirk).

**5.9.3** The establishment of these funds will allow Cabinet to consider the prioritisation of projects, taking account of the agreed criteria such as the level of contributions received and the developments to which they relate.

**5.9.4** In agreeing this approach taken in relation to developer contributions, the Cabinet based their decision on the following key principles:

- that four development contributions funds be established based on the core area/investment corridors as set out in the Local Plan, to be dispersed by the Council in accordance with the policies and priorities contained in the Local Plan, which will be subject to annual review;
- to fund larger strategic works from more than one of the four identified catchment areas;
- that payments from the developer contributions funds are transparent and related to specific projects which are identified on a needs basis within identified catchments, and which would be reviewed annually;
- that the developer contributions are used solely for addressing matters arising from the new developments; and,
- that expenditure from the fund be aligned with the Council's Capital Plan and Revenue Budget.

## **5.10 Windfarm Policy**

**5.10.1** At the time of writing this report, the Governance and Scrutiny Committee has recommended to Cabinet that further consideration be given to achieving a 70:30 split in the contribution made to the local community, and that the Cabinet consider options to maintain this split without resulting in any detriment to the Local Community. Whilst recognising that Cabinet have still to consider this issue, I am sure that Members can take some assurance from Councillor Buchanan's public statement to the Governance and Scrutiny Committee that he was prepared to take the matter back to Cabinet to give serious consideration to any proposal that maintained the 70:30 split and to ensure that local communities were not disadvantaged.

## **5.11 East Ayrshire Council's Carbon Management Programme Strategy and Implementation Plan**

**5.11.1** At its meeting on 21 November 2007, Cabinet approved the East Ayrshire Council's Carbon Management Programme, Strategy, and Implementation Plan. The Strategy and the Implementation Plan are

the guiding documents in achieving the Council's carbon reduction targets in accordance with the agreement made with the Carbon Trust.

**5.11.2** Participation in the Carbon's Trust Local Authority Carbon Management Programme has enabled the Council to quantify its carbon emissions and develop a clear plan of action. The Council will focus on four themes:-

- reducing the environmental impact of the Council's energy consumption;
- reducing the environmental impact of the Council's vehicle fleet;
- reducing the environmental impact of landfill by reducing and recycling of the Council's waste; and
- reducing the environmental impact of street lighting.

**5.11.3** A good example of best practice that East Ayrshire Council is now employing is the proposed new Galston Primary and Nursery School. The school will be one of the most modern design concepts in the United Kingdom, incorporating a number of renewable energy features that will ensure a low carbon footprint. Systems will be installed in the school to monitor energy use and energy generation, thus giving children the opportunity to learn first hand about sustainability and environmental issues.

## **6. MANAGEMENT AND RESOURCES**

### **6.1 Strategic Review of Revenue Budget**

**6.1.1** The Cabinet has endorsed and approved the progress made in taking forward the Strategic Review of the Revenue Budget in accordance with the Council's Best Value Improvement Agenda. The Cabinet will shortly be considering a report at its meeting on 19 December 2007 on the expenditure reduction proposals accruing from stages 1 and 2 grant aided expenditure reviews, together with redistribution proposals to be considered in line with the Council's budget strategy for 2008/09 to 2010/11.

### **6.2 Audit of Accounts 2006/07: Report to Members and the Controller of Audit**

**6.2.1** The Cabinet recently considered an excellent report from its External Auditors, Audit Scotland, following the annual 2006/07 Audit of the Council's Financial Accounts and other activities for the year. East Ayrshire Council is committed to continuous improvement in how we deliver services throughout our communities, and in terms of the independent audit, the report is a clear endorsement of the Council's approach to Governance, financial probity, and Best Value.

### 6.2.2 Some key points from the report covered:-

- an unqualified opinion on our financial statements - and all prepared in accordance with accounting and statutory requirement;
- our SRRB work is "ground breaking" - and provides a foundation for improved efficiencies in service provision;
- on the Community Plan - a high level of achievement against targets - delivering 93% of planned outputs;
- the Council is now fully compliant with Audit Committee principles;
- our performance framework for measuring and monitoring our business is based on many sound elements of performance management;
- good progress in enhancing local SPI's - meeting stakeholder expectations;
- sustained improvement across a range of SPI's;
- clear commitment to delivering Best Value - Improvement Agenda largely implemented; and,
- notable examples of service improvement and Political and management structures, Governance and Scrutiny, and the Strategic Review of the Revenue Budget.

**6.2.3** The above points are but a few of the success stories that have been identified within the report, and I would like to take this opportunity to record my thanks to the Council's Corporate Management Team, all of their staff, and in particular, Fiona Lees, the Chief Executive and Alex McPhee, the Executive Head of Finance, for their strong corporate and financial leadership. It is clear to me that it is a direct result of the combined effort in contribution from all East Ayrshire Council employees that the Council has received such an excellent report from Audit Scotland.

### **6.3 Appraisal of Executive Directors and Heads of Service**

**6.3.1** Following a review of the Council's management structure, it had been agreed that the Chief Executive bring forward proposals for the performance appraisal of Chief Officers. At its meeting on 7 November 2007, the Cabinet approved arrangements for the appraisal of Executive Directors and Heads of Service.

**6.3.2** The appraisal of Executive Directors will commence in February 2008 with completion by 1 April 2008. The relevant Cabinet Spokespersons and one Opposition Spokesperson will be involved within the Appraisal Programme which will involve face-to-face interviews with Executive Directors. The appraisals of Heads of Service will commence in April 2008 with completion by July 2008. In terms of the proposed programme, the Chief Executive and Executive Directors, along with the Leader, will meet with Cabinet Spokespersons to discuss the appraisal process. The appraisals will be carried out annually as part

of the Council's Continuing Improvement Agenda. These appraisals build on arrangements established for the Chief Executive.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

- 7.1** We have new look Council operating a new decision-making structure, which I believe is working effectively in the interests of East Ayrshire. I would wish to thank my Cabinet colleagues for their support and contribution both as portfolio holders and as fellow Cabinet Members. I would also wish to express my appreciation to Councillor Jackson, Leader of the Opposition, for his constructive participation in Cabinet discussions.
- 7.2.** I would like to thank Tom Cook for taking on the role as Chair of the Governance and Scrutiny Committee and his enthusiasm and activity to date in that role are to be commended. I would also thank the Members of the Governance and Scrutiny Committee on the important role that they have played to date within the new decision-making structure. I would further wish to express my appreciation to Provost Young on her effective chairing of Council meetings and on the way in which she has carried out her civic duties as Provost of East Ayrshire Council.
- 7.3** Finally, may I thank all Elected Members of East Ayrshire Council in the role that they play in this new Council and would 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 2008 in maintaining East Ayrshire Council's position as one of the best performing Councils in Scotland.

Councillor Douglas Reid  
Leader of the Council

30 November 2007

**LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS - NIL**