

## **EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

### **COUNCIL MEETING - 16 DECEMBER 2010**

#### **SIX MONTHLY UPDATE ON CABINET ACTIVITIES**

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

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1** As 2010 draws to a close, I am pleased to present my six monthly report to Council highlighting the wide range of important issues considered by Cabinet over, what has been, another busy six month period.
- 1.2** I am again delighted that Cabinet has been able to deal with a broad range of programmes and initiatives which will have a lasting and positive impact on all our communities with the objective of achieving our three strategic priorities of:-
- Regenerating our Town Centres;
  - Improving Educational Attainment; and
  - Building New Council Housing.

### **2. BUDGET 2011/12**

- 2.1** Throughout the country Local Authorities are facing tough choices in setting their 2011/12 budgets. East Ayrshire Council is no exception and is facing reductions in the amount of money available to deliver the services that communities need, expect and enjoy.
- 2.2** Cabinet at its meeting of 1 December 2010, approved the draft General Services Revenue Budget for 2011/12, for consultation, containing a proposed package of measures which will see us continue to pursue our agreed priorities and which recognises that there are some areas where resources need to be focussed to ensure that key longer term outcomes are not unduly compromised, including:
- Children and Families Social Work Services
  - Income maximisation
  - Economic Development
  - Support for Community Groups
  - Environmental sustainability
- 2.3** I believe that an essential part of the budget setting process is engaging with our communities. We need to hear their views on the services we deliver and how we can continue to provide fit for purpose, high quality public services. As such, Cabinet agreed our consultation arrangements for the Council's Revenue Budget on 20 October 2010.

- 2.4** The response to last year's budget consultation was excellent - our communities were realistic about the need to make savings and came forward with some very positive ideas which resulted in changes being incorporated into the final budget and a comprehensive business review programme being undertaken during the year and, so far, this year has been no different. I know that I can rely on our communities, employees and partners again to help us shape the services we deliver in the face of funding cuts in the coming year.
- 2.5** The Council has already carried out a series of meetings with Children and Young People, Community Representatives, Voluntary Sector representatives and business representatives with the main consultation event held on 5 December 2010. These sessions have helped participants understand how the Council sets its budget and gain an understanding of the challenges being faced and importantly hear back from those attending on the proposed package of savings.
- 2.6** The budget consultation will run for two months, closing on 1 February 2011, with the final budget recommendations being considered by Cabinet on 9 February 2011 and Council on 10 February 2011. I have been greatly encouraged by the response so far and I am hopeful that this will continue throughout the consultation period.

### **3. DEVELOPING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

#### **3.1 Local Community Planning Forums**

- 3.1.1** The Local Community Planning Forums have met on two occasions since my last report. As always there was good debate and discussion at the Forums with a number of important topics covered.
- 3.1.2** In August the Forums met individually and discussed topics including Mental Health and Community Wellbeing; Alcohol Misuse; Regeneration in Kilmarnock, and Town and Village Regeneration.
- 3.1.3** In November the Forums came together in a joint Forum to discuss Community Safety and considered issues such as Community Policing, Community Safety and Diversionary Activities with a very informative presentation given by Superintendent Coubrough.
- 3.1.4** The actions arising from these meetings will be taken forward by Officers and Partners and reported to a future meeting of Cabinet, as appropriate.

#### **3.2 Equalities Forum**

- 3.2.1** The Equalities Forum met in September and discussed two of the priorities set for 2010/11, namely access to Public Transport and the location and availability of public toilets.

**3.2.2** In terms of public transport, Sarah Murray, Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) gave a presentation on SPT's role in transport within East Ayrshire and members of the Forum then had the opportunity to ask questions of SPT, First Scotrail, Stagecoach and representatives of the Council. A number of actions were identified in relation to the issues raised, and it was agreed that there would be a feedback session at the next meeting of the Forum in February 2011.

### **3.3 Children and Young People**

**3.3.1** The Children and Young People's Forum has met on two occasions and has discussed Physical, Mental and Sexual Health and the Council's budget.

**3.3.2** This was the first time that we have had a session on the budget specifically for young people. I was delighted to be part of the event and was encouraged by their general awareness young people have of the wider economic position and understanding of the role of the Council and the services we deliver. The debate was most thought provoking and the contributions from the young people were of a very high standard with the Members and council officers that were present taking away a lot of useful information which will inform the budget setting process.

## **4. STRATEGIC PLANNING, MANAGEMENT AND RESOURCES AND EQUALITIES**

### **4.1 "Make It Kilmarnock"**

**4.1.1** In my report to Council this time last year, I reflected on the decision taken by Diageo to close its Kilmarnock packaging plant and to sub-contract its Hurlford consolidation warehouse operations. At that time I told you that we would be working to address the negative impact that the closure of the plant will have on Kilmarnock. I am extremely pleased to report that is exactly what we have been doing.

**4.1.2** Members will be aware that the Council allocated £100,000 per annum for three years from 2010/11 to support the work of the 'Make it Kilmarnock' Local Taskforce. The new Make It Kilmarnock Strategic Advisory Board has now been established with a wide membership including representation for the Council, the local MSP and MP, and representation from the business community. The Board has met on 2 occasions and is due to meet again in January 2011.

**4.1.3** The Strategic Advisory Board is taking forward 4 key themes:

- Education Innovation
- Visitor attraction
- Business nurture
- Vibrant Heart

- 4.1.4** Good progress is being made against all of these themes with a range of projects and actions being taken forward by the lead officers responsible for each.
- 4.1.5** The Advisory Board is supported and co-ordinated by an officer seconded from Scottish Enterprise. Specialist support from the Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment is also in place to support the production of an Integrated Urban Development Plan (IUDP) for Kilmarnock Town Centre. The IUDP work is progressing well and I was pleased to open the latest in a series of Workshops at the Grand Hall, Kilmarnock on 24 November 2010.
- 4.1.6** Cabinet also agreed to appoint Retail Rocks Ltd to provide specialist services in terms of encouraging, enabling and supporting sustainable retail entrepreneurship. The project's overall ambition is to take vacant retail units and transform them into vibrant retail businesses. Phase 1 of the project is underway. This involves an analysis of the existing retail provision within the town, identifying opportunities for new retail offerings, identification of potential vacant shop units which could form the basis of Phase 2 of the project, and possible sources of funding to support Phase 2. The Phase 1 draft report will be brought to Cabinet in the New Year.
- 4.1.7** I believe that 'Make it Kilmarnock' will have a significant contribution on how we shape the future of the town and I am confident that we have the necessary skills and experience in place, having brought together a wide range of specialists from the public and private sector to assist us in this work.

## **4.2 Shared Services**

- 4.2.1** Progress continues to be made in relation to the Shared Services Agenda through the Ayrshire Shared Services Group and the Ayrshire Shared Services Project Board. The latter was established in August to drive forward this important area of work and will oversee commissioning, monitoring and reporting of all shared services projects between any or all of the partners.
- 4.2.2** Progress has been made in relation to a number of key areas over the last year, including Regulatory Services, Roads and Transportation and the Ayrshire Economic Partnership. In addition, the report to Cabinet showed that the Council has considered the recommendations arising from the Clyde Valley Review.
- 4.2.3** It is important that as a Council we continue to push forward and develop the right opportunities for collaborative working, approaching in a structured/evidenced based way to overcome any barriers and improve outcomes for our communities.

## **4.3 Health and Safety**

- 4.3.1** Members will recall that earlier this year Cabinet received a follow up report on progress against the review of the Council's Health and Safety Arrangements

undertaken by Peter Ralston, Health and Safety Consultant. Health and Safety is paramount in all that we do and I know that colleagues take such matters seriously.

- 4.3.2 An update on the operation of the Corporate Health and Safety Section was provided to Cabinet on 18 August 2010. The report covered operations in Quarter 1 of 2010/11.
- 4.3.3 Monitoring and reporting mechanisms for health and safety performance have improved across a range of measures in the last year. It is anticipated that with the continued implementation of effective health and safety practices improvements will be maintained.
- 4.3.4 A further update report to Cabinet is planned for the New Year.

## **5. PROMOTING LIFELONG LEARNING**

### **5.1 East Ayrshire Children and Young People's Services Plan: Annual Review 2009/10**

- 5.1.1 Cabinet recently approved the 2009/10 annual review of the East Ayrshire Children and Young People's Services Plan, which is the fourth full plan published within East Ayrshire.
- 5.1.2 The plan is aligned with the East Ayrshire Community Plan and adopts the vision and principles of the Community Plan. Within an East Ayrshire context the overarching Community Plan remains central to planning and service activities, and more recently the Single Outcome Agreement has been developed across community planning partners.
- 5.1.3 The Community Health Partnership arrangements are now in place and the implementation of the Children and Young People's Service Plan remains a key document to measure success in relation to improving outcomes for children and young people.
- 5.1.4 Overall, performance against targets and indicators was very good with the vast majority of targets having been met. The exceptions to this are in relation to breastfeeding rates and teenage pregnancy. These issues are currently being addressed by colleagues in the Community Health Partnership. A separate Breastfeeding Action Plan has been developed and the NHS Sexual Strategy Group will continue to address issues in respect of teenage pregnancy rates.

### **5.2 Youth Music Initiative**

- 5.2.1 Cabinet agreed recently to approve a further year of Youth Music Initiative activity in 2010/11 based on the recent successful funding application to the Scottish Arts Council of £189,888.

- 5.2.3** East Ayrshire Council has once again scooped a prestigious National Music Council award for its high quality music provision to young people in schools.
- 5.2.4** Since 2000, East Ayrshire is the only Scottish Local Authority to have been awarded the Major Trophy - and the only Local Authority in Scotland to have been the recipient of such an award on more than one occasion. This is the sixth year in a row East Ayrshire has received an award. Last year, particular comment was made of the wide range of opportunities for young people in East Ayrshire to join authority bands, choirs and ensembles, the excellent activities supporting curricular development and the wide range of partnerships with national companies.
- 5.2.5** Major awards were won by only two Councils in this year's awards list - Devon and East Ayrshire. An award ceremony was held on Tuesday 23 November 2010 in London.
- 5.2.6** This is another deserved success for East Ayrshire's Music Service within Educational and Social Services. Pupils receive expert instrumental instruction in schools and as a result hold concerts of exceedingly high standards.

### **5.3 Anti-Bullying Behaviour Policy for Children and Young People**

- 5.3.1** At its meeting on 17 November 2010, Cabinet approved an anti-bullying policy for children and young people which will be used across all services of the Council.
- 5.3.2** This updated policy reflects current national policy and the multi-disciplinary nature of working with children and young people. The policy has been developed in conjunction with the National Organisation Respectme, Scotland's anti-bullying service which was launched in March 2007.
- 5.3.3** The policy was developed by a Working Group of colleagues across services within the Department of Educational and Social Services with consultation taking place with children from six schools.
- 5.3.4** The consultation sought to hear the views of children and young people about how children and young people who are bullied might be helped and how those who are doing the bullying might be helped to stop this type of behaviour.
- 5.3.5** The policy focuses on prevention, identification and support and sets out strategies to assist staff if a young person tells them they have been bullied and importantly sets out arrangements for monitoring and recording information which requires to be submitted centrally in order for the overall incidents of bullying behaviour to be monitored, including the need to revise policies and procedures.
- 5.3.6** The anti-bullying behaviour policy supports a number of themes and in particular Promoting Community Safety; Improving Health and Wellbeing in the sense that it relates to the mental wellbeing of children and young people and

Promoting Lifelong Learning in the sense that if children are being bullied they are not best able to participate in their learning journey.

#### **5.4 The National Top Up Swimming Programme**

**5.4.1** Cabinet recently approved the use of the Top Up Swimming Programme across all Learning Communities in East Ayrshire. This will assist us to improve the opportunities for school aged children to learn to swim.

**5.4.2** East Ayrshire currently provide swimming lessons as part of the curriculum and this additional funding will further enhance the programme by providing additional teachers to support current swimming lessons, additional lessons to enhance the current swimming programme and education, resources and equipment for tutors and teachers to improve the quality of provision.

**5.4.3** This programme supports the increasing participation of young people in sport and physical activity, in learning and active citizenship via the themes of Promoting Lifelong Learning and Improving Health and Wellbeing.

### **6. DELIVERING COMMUNITY REGENERATION**

#### **6.1 Winter Service Plan and Improvement Plan**

**6.1.1** We have already started to feel the cold weather bite and expectations are that we are in for another cold winter. A new Winter Service Plan was approved by Cabinet earlier this year and preparations for the colder weather started in earnest in advance of the winter season.

**6.1.2** For two consecutive winters the whole country was gripped by prolonged spells of extremely cold weather and last winter was the worst experienced since 1964. As Members will be aware, the Council's Governance and Scrutiny Committee carried out a full review of last year's winter response. The findings were very positive but Members took the opportunity to further improve the existing winter service provision in readiness for the winter ahead.

**6.1.3** By reviewing and updating our gritting routes we are able to target our resources more effectively. We have also reviewed footway gritting. Previously footway gritting was carried out reactively during the working day. However, we have taken on board feedback and have introduced precautionary footway treatment routes including main access routes to schools, public services and health facilities.

**6.1.4** The efforts of many of our employees, and indeed members of the public, last year were incredible. It is not possible to treat all footways, and we, as a Council, are encouraging community resilience and self help with the introduction of community grit bins.

**6.1.5** In addition to the introduction of improved priority routes and community grit bins, a new real time web based Winter Service Management System has been

introduced which will improve the dissemination of information relating to winter treatment decisions and also action taken. The system will help to improve the management of salt stocks and provide improved performance monitoring and reporting.

## **6.2 Strategic Housing Investment Plan 2011/12-2015/16**

**6.2.1** Cabinet recently approved the updated East Ayrshire Strategic Housing Investment Plan covering the period up to 2016.

**6.2.2** The Investment Programme detailed in the plan anticipates an Affordable Housing Investment Programme Allocation of £29.738 million and seeks to deliver 449 houses to meet the needs of residents in our communities across East Ayrshire with a total programme spend of £54.743 million.

**6.2.3** The Plan has been developed within the context of the Scottish Government's vision for the future of housing in Scotland as set out in "Firm Foundations".

**6.2.4** Within one of the four main themes of Delivering Community Regeneration, the Community Planning Partners seek to promote a wide range of housing which is attractive to people who live in East Ayrshire, recognising the needs of older people, people with a disability and homeless people, so as to provide suitable accommodation for people as they move through their various life situations. The provision of a range of affordable housing solutions, as detailed in the plan, will support this key theme as set out in the East Ayrshire Community Plan.

## **6.3 New Local Authority Housing**

**6.3.1** I am absolutely delighted that the first phase of our ambitious house building programme at Macdonald Drive in Kilmarnock has been completed ahead of schedule with the houses now completed and in the process of being handed over to the Council. The homes will be designated as low level supported accommodation and will be let to older and ambulant disabled people. This will allow larger properties to be released to families currently on our housing lists.

**6.3.2** Phase 2 will commence in December across three sites and will provide an additional eight houses in Bellfield, sixteen houses in Onthank and six houses in Fenwick for older and ambulant disabled people.

**6.3.3** The provision of further new Council housing across East Ayrshire will continue to support the creation of sustainable communities by redressing stock lost through the Right to Buy. It will also provide new, smaller sized houses suitable for older service users in response to demographic trend data, thereby allowing larger sized accommodation to be allocated to families wishing to remain within their local communities. In this way, Council led new housing development will contribute to alleviating pressures on affordable housing waiting lists and promoting area regeneration across East Ayrshire.

**6.3.4** The Council has also been successful in its submission to the Scottish

Government for funding to assist in the provision of ten new council houses which will be situated on Newlands Drive, Kilmarnock. This is in accordance with the general aims of the approved East Ayrshire Strategic Housing Investment Plans. This third phase of building new Council houses builds on the excellent progress made with the first two phases.

#### **6.4 Housing Allocations Policy**

**6.4.1** Cabinet recently approved a new Housing Allocations Policy which will be common to the Council and four registered social landlords operating within East Ayrshire.

**6.4.2** This new policy addresses the needs of our tenants, incorporates advice from the Scottish Housing Regulator and reflects the views of our tenants and all Elected Members. It is a more accessible and open approach to housing allocations and has a sharper focus on the needs of young people, specifically those who are looked after and are about to leave care, providing those in greatest needs with better opportunities.

#### **6.5 Community Planning Partnership – Employability Services: ESF Priority 5 Funding Application**

**6.5.1** Building on existing good partnership working new and enhanced partnership arrangements have been proposed for the delivery of employability services across East Ayrshire from 1 July 2011. Cabinet agreed to proceed with a Stage 2 application for ESF Priority 5 Funding, following confirmation from Scottish Government that following a Stage 1 application submitted in August the Community Planning Partnership could proceed to the detailed Stage 2 application.

**6.5.2** The new East Ayrshire Works Priority 5 services will be managed by the Council's Skills Development and Employability Service and will include a whole range of new and existing partners.

**6.5.3** The estimated project costs for the two year period is £7.3 million and the ESF grant sought is £3.3 million. Cabinet agreed to match fund the project for the next three years. Notwithstanding this, the Skills Development and Employability Service is currently carrying out a review to ensure efficiencies by way of changes to services delivered, aligning employees to demand and making better use of all resources, including premises and transport.

#### **6.6 East Ayrshire Tourism Strategy - Annual Performance Monitoring**

**6.6.1** As Members will know the East Ayrshire Tourism Strategy and Action Plan: The Way Ahead 2009-15 was approved by Cabinet in 2009.

**6.6.2** The strategy is based on six key aims which the Council has been working towards, including proactively marketing the area as an attractive destination; improving the tourism infrastructure and developing an active, connected tourism community.

- 6.6.3** Some of the work that has been going on has involved networking events with over 60 tourism businesses being held as well as research and information monitoring being carried out to provide data that can be used to inform future marketing initiatives.
- 6.6.4** The value of the tourism industry in East Ayrshire to the local economy has grown to its highest ever level of £62.9 million in 2009, which was an increase of 13 % (4.2% in real terms) since 2006.
- 6.6.5** East Ayrshire has a rich and fascinating history and heritage, connections to famous Scots, a range of visitor attractions and areas of outstanding natural beauty which can provide opportunities for a range of outdoor activities and recreation. Over the coming year we will aim to continue to maintain, and wherever possible, increase the growth of this important industry sector by working with industry and partner organisations to enhance the contribution that tourism makes to our local economy.
- 6.6.6** The very recent award to the Burns Monument Centre of four star visitor status by Visit Scotland is fitting recognition of the high level of service provided by our employees and the very high standards generally within the centre and a good example of the progress that we have made in terms of visitor attractions.
- 6.7 Renewable Energy Fund**
- 6.7.1** Members will be aware that Cabinet has previously received reports on the procedures for the operation of the Renewable Energy Fund.
- 6.7.2** Most recently a consultation regarding these procedures has been undertaken with local community groups and organisations within the proposed Whitelee Windfarm Eligible area. Consultation also took place with Head Teachers of schools within the area.
- 6.7.3** These groups and organisation were provided with information informing them of the position and invited to attend a meeting to discuss the proposals.
- 6.7.4** As you would imagine a wide range of views were received both on the specific issues upon which they were being consulted and the wider general principles. Comments received were generally supportive of the principles behind the fund.
- 6.7.5** Some of the changes recommended following the consultation were agreement to a rolling programme of applications, additional guidance on eligible applicants and projects, inclusion of a further simplified application form at Stage 2 for projects between £1,000 and £10,000, setting a minimum of £1,000 on eligible projects, inclusion of targets on carbon reductions in the appraisal criteria and the need for an annual report on performance with a review of outputs and outcomes.
- 6.7.6** I look forward to receiving future annual reports on performance of the fund.

## **6.8 2010-11 Bridge and Culvert Strengthening Programme**

- 6.8.1** Members will recall that last year Cabinet approved a ten year bridges investment programme taking account of priorities and affordability. A sum of £8.96 million was approved for bridge and culvert strengthening works over ten years from 2009/10 to 2018/19 and a further sum of £1 million was allocated for the construction of a bridge over the Kilmarnock Water at Dean Road to replace the existing ford and footbridge.
- 6.8.2** A Feasibility Study to consider options for the construction of a bridge over the Kilmarnock Water at Dean Road was commissioned in 2009/10 and a final report was received from the consultants at the end of May 2010. The report recommends a bridge of box culvert construction to replace the ford and adjacent footbridge. The progress of this project will be reported in the normal manner through the Finance and Service Strategy report to Cabinet.
- 6.8.3** £650,000 has been allocated this financial year for bridge and culvert strengthening throughout East Ayrshire. Amongst other measures, this money will go towards the replacement of the Muck Water Bridge near Dalmellington and a contribution towards the replacement of Skeldon Bridge, near Dalrymple.

## **7. COMMUNITY SAFETY**

### **7.1 Traffic, Transportation and Road Safety Programmes 2010/11**

- 7.1.1** Cabinet earlier this year allocated £465,000 towards Traffic, Transportation and Road Safety Schemes.
- 7.1.2** These Schemes will include Road Safety Schemes, Safer Neighbourhoods (20mph Zones), Rural Route Action Plans, Strategic Route Improvements, Accessibility and Suitable Transport/Bus Infrastructure Improvements.
- 7.1.3** The Scottish Government has also allocated £212,000 to East Ayrshire to improve facilities for pedestrians, cyclists and other vulnerable road users such as children travelling to and from school.
- 7.1.4** SPT has allocated just over £2 million for projects in East Ayrshire which include £1.1 million towards Real Time Passenger information, £500,000 to Stewarton Station Park and Ride and £593,000 for A70 and A71 route improvements.
- 7.1.5** £250k has also been transferred to the Carriageway Structural Maintenance Programme to assist with the repair of roads due to last year's severe winter weather.
- 7.1.6** One of the key indicators in the Single Outcome Agreement is about meeting the national casualty reduction targets and I am pleased to report that the

national and local targets have been exceeded to date.

- 7.1.7** These projects supports the delivery of the outcomes of East Ayrshire Council's Community Plan including reducing fatalities and casualties as a result of road traffic collisions and promoting transport solutions.

## **8. CONCLUSIONS**

- 8.3** In conclusion, once again I would like to thank all of our Council officers for producing and presenting a varied and exciting range of work to Cabinet and as always to Elected Members for their continued positive participation in all elements of the decision-making structure.
- 8.4** We now enter another busy period in the Council's year with a particular focus on the Budget consultation process heading toward setting the budget in February 2011. This is a most challenging time for the Council but, in all of this, I remain committed to protecting our most valued services and to engaging with our communities.

Councillor Douglas Reid  
**Leader of the Council**

CB/SC