

## **EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL MEETING: 26 JUNE 2008**

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

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

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1** As the first year of the new Council comes to an end, it gives me great pleasure to present to Council my second six monthly report on the activities of the Cabinet. It has been a particularly busy six months and much has been achieved over this period. A summary of the major achievements and issues considered by Cabinet is provided within this report.

#### **2. THE DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE**

- 2.1** The new Cabinet decision making arrangements are working well. In the first year, Cabinet has been able to focus on strategic issues and on implementing a wide range of key service delivery decisions. Cabinet meets every two weeks, allowing expedited decision making and to improved accountability across the Council. The new arrangements come with improved openness and transparency, with all Members provided with copies of Cabinet papers in advance of meetings and notified of Cabinet decisions within 36 hours.
- 2.2** The new Governance and Scrutiny arrangements are also working well and I have been encouraged by the content, substance and quality of reports received by Cabinet from the Governance and Scrutiny Committee. A recent example considered by the Cabinet is an excellent report from this Committee on its review of the Council's Waste Recycling Policy and Kerbside Recycling Scheme, the recommendations of which were accepted in principle by Cabinet. Cabinet has requested the Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services to report to a future meeting of Cabinet with details of associated costs and proposals for implementation.
- 2.3** I am aware that the Governance and Scrutiny Committee has also embarked on a challenging programme of further reviews covering Affordable Housing, Complaints arising from Contract Works in Council Houses and the Masternaut Vehicle Traffic Management System and I look forward to receiving the Committee's reports over the coming months on the outcome of these scrutiny reviews.
- 2.4** The review of the Council's decision making structures has strengthened and further developed community engagement and links with Community Planning structures. The establishment of four Local Community Planning Forums, on which Elected Members, Community Representatives and Community Planning Partners are all represented, have already begun to provide a robust structure for engaging with local communities, driving forward service

improvements and ensuring that the services we deliver are responsive to the needs of local communities.

- 2.5** Excellent progress has been made with a successful 'Working Together, Learning Together' event held in early April 2008, when Members from all Forums came together to set their priorities for the year ahead. The first round of Community Planning Forum meetings has recently concluded and initial feedback has been very positive; with Community Representatives confirming that they feel fully engaged and actively involved in the decision making process. The output from these meetings will now be actioned by officers and reported to Cabinet, as appropriate.
- 2.7** An Equalities Forum, supported by four equalities networks (Gender, Disability, Race and Older People) is being established to ensure that all sections of the community are genuinely engaged in the Community Planning process. Work has been ongoing to populate these groups and an equalities workshop event followed by the first meeting of the Equalities Forum is scheduled to be held over the summer months.
- 2.8** In terms of children and young people, a series of consultation events have been held to seek the views of young people on how they would wish to be involved in the Council's decision making process. The Cabinet recognised that arrangements for engaging and consulting with children and young people in East Ayrshire were well established, but determined that further support could be provided and that arrangements could be strengthened. Cabinet subsequently took the decision to establish a Children and Young People's Forum.
- 2.9** This Forum will meet at least twice per year and a very successful annual workshop was held on 13 June to identify the key issues that will be taken forward in 2008/09. I, along with a number of Elected Members attended the workshop and I was very impressed by the arrangements and by the active participation of the young people. I look forward to working with them over the coming year.

### **3. MANAGEMENT AND RESOURCES**

#### **3.1 Revenue Budget 2008/09**

**3.1.1** In February 2008, the Cabinet presented to Council the first Budget of the new Administration. I welcomed the opportunity to freeze Council Tax rates at 2007/08 levels and to put forward a Budget focusing on re-directing resources over a range of exiting projects and activities. This will ensure that resources are prioritised in accordance with Community Planning priorities. Proposals included:

- an additional £1.75m investment in Educational and Social Services;
- an additional £1m for a series of innovative measures intended to support regeneration initiatives in our town centres, with major projects identified in Kilmarnock, Darvel, Cumnock and Mauchline;

- mainstreaming funding for the CHIP Van, New Sporting Futures and the Recreation Partnership;
- below inflation rent increases with a continuing commitment to meet programme targets to bring all of our housing up to the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2015.

**3.1.2** The new Scottish Government has created the Fairer Scotland Fund designed to tackle poverty and deprivation across Scotland. This replaces a number of programmes and previously ring fenced funding streams. East Ayrshire Council, together with its Community Planning Partners will utilise £4.652m for 2008/09 to tackle area based and individual poverty and to help more people access and sustain employment opportunities.

**3.1.3** The Community Planning Partnership has also secured in excess of £3m ESF/ERDF funding over the next 2 years to deliver our Employability Services. When added to the match funding from the Council and the Fairer Scotland Funding, this will ensure a long term and sustainable provision of our residents who are furthest from employment.

### **3.2 General Services Capital Programme 2008/09 – 2012/13**

**3.2.1** In terms of capital investment, the Cabinet set an exciting 5 year General Services Capital Programme totalling £100 million, which will be reviewed annually. New Strategic Projects agreed include:-

- significant investment in school buildings including a new state of the art replacement for Witchhill and Woodstock special schools and extensive refurbishments of Darvel Primary and Flowerbank Nursery
- new community facilities in Stewarton and Galston;
- a new older people's community support unit;
- new sports facilities in Stewarton, Knockentiber and Netherthird
- new national standard athletics facilities in Kilmarnock
- an annual parks development programme, starting at the Kay Park, Kilmarnock; and
- improvements to the Dean Castle Country Park and Visitor Centre.

### **3.3 Best Value and Community Planning Improvement Plan: Workforce Planning Strategy**

**3.3.1** Good progress continues to be made in implementing the Improvement Agenda arising from the September 2006 Best Value and Community Planning Audit. Cabinet has now agreed proposals for the Council's Workforce Planning Strategy to be fully embedded into Departmental Service Planning arrangements by 31 March 2009 and for the 2009 annual budgetary process. This will build upon the workforce planning and employee management activities that are currently in place and will provide a Council-wide view of the structure, capacity and skills mix required to meet the current and future demands of our service users, balanced with resources available to the Council.

## **4. LIFELONG LEARNING**

### **4.1 Strengthening the Delivery of a Curriculum for Excellence**

**4.1.1** The Curriculum for Excellence establishes clear values, purposes and principles for the education of 3-18 year olds in Scotland. The underlying aim is that all children should develop their capacities as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to society. The Council has embraced the fundamental aims and aspirations of the Curriculum and has made significant progress over the last two years. Staff in schools have been working to develop a curriculum which will enable all young people to realise their full potential and equip them for work and learning throughout their lives.

**4.1.2** In order to strengthen the local delivery of the Curriculum, Cabinet agreed to second a head teacher or depute head teacher with significant expertise at both a strategic and operational level to provide advice and guidance on how best to roll out aspects of curriculum development and innovative teaching practices in schools and classrooms across the authority.

**4.1.3** So, in line with the groundbreaking November 2007 Concordat Agreement, and to ensure that our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, and responsible citizens, the Council has already taken steps to move forward with the specified commitment around the Curriculum for Excellence throughout our schools. Our Single Outcome Agreement, approved at Cabinet on 18 June, sets four new challenging outcomes around: improved academic achievement; equipping our young people with 'skills for work'; developing skills in 'enterprise' and 'creativity'; and reducing absence and exclusion rates.

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

**4.2.1** The Better Schools: Better Learning consultation is the most significant consultation exercises carried out by the new Council to date. The Council's consultation exercise on this matter far exceeded the minimum statutory requirements and resulted in over 2,200 responses being received.

**4.2.2** From the outset, the Better Schools: Better Learning Initiative was never about a cost-cutting exercise, it was about recognising that today's schools must be fit for purpose and the need to consider the associated costs required to maintain such schools into the future. The consultation was just that, a public consultation, which engaged parents, pupils, staff and interested parties from the local community, and highlighted the challenges that face the Council in maintaining and improving the school estate.

**4.2.3** In reaching a decision, Cabinet considered both the educational argument and wider community issues outlined within officer's reports, presentations by spokespersons from each of the school parent's councils involved in the process, and submissions by local Elected Members. All Members will be aware of the outcome of the Cabinet's deliberations, and having listened to all parties involved, I am convinced that Cabinet has made an informed decision, demonstrating our commitment to local rural communities and supports the Scottish Government's wider commitment to rural schools.

**4.2.4** Cabinet has now approved a project outline for the next stages of the Better Schools: Better Learning Initiative. Cabinet has also agreed to receive regular reports from the Executive Director of Educational and Social Services on progress and copies of these reports will of course be made available to all Elected Members.

### **4.3 Links with other Countries**

**4.3.1** In recognition of the crucial importance of China as a global economic power and cultural influence, Cabinet has agreed to take up membership of the Scottish Parliamentary Cross-Party Group on China, to promote relations between Scotland and China. I look forward to representing the Council on the Cross-Party Group and to working with a range of organisations and authorities to increase cultural, educational and economic exchange between the two countries. I am particularly optimistic about the proposal to develop a dialogue with the Chinese consulate in Edinburgh and to engage with the wider Chinese community in Scotland.

**4.3.2** At a local level, Cabinet has also agreed to the further development of the teaching of Chinese in our schools by establishing a 'Confucius Classroom' in Grange Academy. One of six across Scotland, this facility will act as a "hub" for teaching Chinese language and culture by offering lessons in Chinese to secondary pupils and adult learners from across Ayrshire. Outreach work will also take place with Primary and Special Schools, all with the aim of encouraging members of our community to gain national qualifications in Chinese.

**4.3.3** In recognition of the Scottish Government's wish to encourage the development of educational links with Malawi, Cabinet has also agreed to support the East Ayrshire Schools' Malawi Group in developing links which will raise awareness within East Ayrshire schools of issues facing school children in Malawi, and in developing educational projects between schools and clusters of schools.

### **4.4 The Future for Food in Scotland: Scottish Government Discussion Choosing the Right ingredients**

**4.4.1** I am delighted that East Ayrshire is now considered a leading exemplar of best practice in this area of activity. We have developed our own sustainable food strategy for schools, adopted new procurement and supply chain practices to encourage the use of local fresh produce, and have ensured that

food is considered a significant issue in our schools. In 30 Primary Schools, 30% of the food used is organic, at least 70% is sourced locally and over 90% of the food used is fresh and unprocessed. The Holyrood magazine of October 2007 indicated “if you want to see an example of the principles underpinning the Government’s national food policy in action, you could hardly do better than visit East Ayrshire”.

**4.4.2** In recognition of the Council’s success in this area, East Ayrshire has been invited along with the Scottish Government’s Food Policy Team to participate in a trans European initiative involving ten other European countries. There is a new focus on the role of food as a multi-functional instrument that can link health, environmental and cultural wellbeing, whilst at the same time increasing employment and encouraging diversity of economic activity. The aim of the programme is to exploit these opportunities by enabling public authorities to exchange and develop best practice.

**4.4.3** An Interreg application for European Funding, which requires to be submitted by December 2008, is currently being co-ordinated by the Government Office for the South West through South West Food and Drink. The Cabinet welcomes the opportunity to participate in this innovative programme and has supported the bid for this further European funding.

## **5. COMMUNITY WELLBEING**

### **5.1 Joint Inspection of Services to Protect Children and Young People in the East Ayrshire Council Area**

**5.1.1** Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) published a final report on the Joint Inspection of Services to Protect Children and Young People in the East Ayrshire Council area in January 2008. The inspection covered services provided by health, the police, the Council and the Scottish Children’s Reporters Administration, as well as those provided by voluntary and independent organisations.

**5.1.2** The Chief Officers’ Group considered the report to be one of the most positive Child Protection reports received by any Scottish Local Authority area. It clearly demonstrated the commitment and good work being done by key agencies to protect our children and keep them safe. Following on from the report, Cabinet agreed that the Child Protection Chief Officers’ Group progress the preparation of an action plan to address the issues identified by the Chief Inspector as part of the annual business planning process of the Child Protection Committee.

### **5.2 Inspection of East Ayrshire Council’s Housing and Homelessness Service**

**5.2.1** I welcome the recent publication of the Scottish Housing Regulator’s report on the Inspection of the Council’s Housing and Homelessness Service. Again, this independent external assessment of the effectiveness of the delivery of

the Council's Housing Service is one of the most positive reports received and I am pleased to note that an assessment of the report's findings places East Ayrshire in the top performance quartile of all Scottish local authorities who have been fully inspected to date.

**5.2.2** In terms of continuous improvement, the Inspection has identified a number of recommendations for the Council's Housing and Homelessness Services and earlier this month, Cabinet approved an Improvement Plan to address the key recommendations of the report in respect of services to homeless people, housing management, and asset management and repairs.

### **5.3 Homecoming 2009**

**5.3.1** In support of the Scottish Government's Initiative for Scotland's Year of Homecoming 2009, the Cabinet has approved two major exhibitions around the themes of Burns, Enlightenment and Innovation. The two events proposed include:-

- a showcase of East Ayrshire's link with Robert Burns and Scottish Creativity in a new exhibition that will run from February to June 2009. The exhibition will feature new commissions and collections which will tell the story of Burns and use this as a way of exploring creative Ayrshire in its widest form; and
- a second exhibition featuring innovation and enlightenment will follow from June – September 2009. This will tell the story of Ayrshire's great innovators from Murdoch to the present day and will feature key collections relating to this theme.

**5.3.2** In addition, activities involving our Town Twinning partners will also be arranged with representatives from the Twin Towns invited for short visits to participate in the Homecoming events.

## **6. ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION**

### **6.1 Kilmarnock**

#### **CARS and THI Programs**

**6.1.1** The Council had already identified that significant shortfalls existed in traditional building skills within East Ayrshire. Under the Kilmarnock Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme and the Kilmarnock John Finnie Street and Bank Street Townscape Heritage Initiative, a training plan has been developed to provide a comprehensive range of training opportunities.

**6.1.2** Cabinet has authorised the negotiation of a contract with the Scottish Lime Centre Trust to provide this training package in traditional building skills. The Scottish Lime Centre Trust is a charitable organisation that has developed as a 'not for profit' advisory, training, and education organisation.

**6.1.3** The introduction of the Traditional Building Skills Training Programme and the development of a training contract with an organisation at the centre of

excellence in building conservation, will provide significant opportunities in terms of training, and secure future environmental improvements for East Ayrshire.

### **Seagulls**

**6.1.4** Cabinet recognised the problems that were being experienced by members of the public within Kilmarnock and agreed a number of proposals to be carried out in 2008 to address the problem. These proposals included an enhanced educative programme targeting the public and businesses, relative to feeding of the seagulls and the use of secure bins for food waste. One action that has been a great success has been the use of birds of prey to physically deter the gulls from nesting. This successful activity will continue throughout the nesting season and Council Officers will thereafter seek feedback from the public on the service.

### **6.2 Cumnock**

**6.3.1** Myself, as Leader of the Council and Elizabeth Morton as Depute Chief Executive/Executive Director of Corporate Support have been appointed as Directors to the two joint venture companies that will take forward the key retail and property developments of the Cumnock Town Centre Regeneration Project. I can also advise Members that I will have great pleasure in opening the Project Office, which is located in Glaisnock Shopping Centre, on Tuesday 24 June 2008.

### **6.3 New Cumnock**

**6.3.1** In response to feedback from the local community, and continuing with the focus on town centre regeneration, Cabinet has agreed to work with Community Planning Partners to identify and implement a mechanism for the preparation of a 'Whole Town Strategy' for New Cumnock.

**6.3.2** A three-stage approach has been agreed to progress the preparation of the Whole Town Strategy for New Cumnock.

- Stage 1* - a full baseline audit to include all physical, social and economic issues impacting on New Cumnock.
- Stage 2* - preparation of a draft strategy and action plan.
- Stage 3* - development of detailed community participation and empowerment.

**6.3.3** Progressing concurrently is the development of an early action plan, which will address a range of issues, including effective community engagement, derelict buildings, the public sector estate portfolio, potential for economic regeneration and identification of funding sources.

**6.3.4** Cabinet further agreed that this innovative approach to town centre regeneration in New Cumnock should be trialled as a pilot to assess whether it could be applied to other small towns in East Ayrshire. In recognition of the proposal to further develop such an approach, the Depute Chief Executive/

Executive Director of Corporate Support has been invited to report to Cabinet on the development of a way forward for East Ayrshire regarding the preparation of Holistic Whole Town Strategies.

## **6.4 Tourism**

**6.4.1** There is undoubtedly a major opportunity for developing tourism within East Ayrshire and at the beginning of this month Cabinet took a major step towards achieving that goal by approving a Tourism Framework for East Ayrshire through to 2015. In addition, the Cabinet also authorised the creation of a dedicated budget to aid in the delivery of the framework's objectives.

**6.4.2** Cabinet recognises that the development of the tourism industry in East Ayrshire requires collaboration with a wide range of industry stakeholders both at local, regional and national level. To this end a service level agreement will be developed with Visit Scotland for 2008/09. Further, the Cabinet has recently approved the involvement of the Council's onsite Catering Service in supporting the development of Dumfries House as a visitor attraction within East Ayrshire.

**6.4.3** The Cabinet intends to monitor progress on this important initiative and the Depute Chief Executive/ Executive Director of Corporate Support has been invited to bring forward regular performance monitoring reports.

## **6.5 Wind Farm Policy**

**6.5.1** Following 'call in' by the Governance and Scrutiny Committee, and in line with the subsequent recommendation of that Committee to ensure that local communities are not disadvantaged in relation to the dispersal of Wind Farm Developer Funds, Cabinet has approved a revised dispersal formula to ensure that those communities most affected by wind farms are given priority. Under the new policy, for the first 10 years, all developer contributions will be directed exclusively to local projects. Thereafter, contributions will be split 50/50 between local projects and projects within the wider East Ayrshire area. The frontloading of contributions to local areas will allow for match funding to be maximised and speed up the delivery of significant local projects.

**6.5.2** The revised policy also provides for the creation of an East Ayrshire-wide Renewable Energy Fund to disburse contributions in the form of grants. Cabinet recognises the importance of ensuring community consultation in the decision making process and I can assure colleagues that local Elected Member and community consultation will be built into the operating arrangements for the Fund, which are currently being developed, and will be presented to Cabinet in the near future.

## **7. COMMUNITY PLANNING AND EQUALITIES**

### **7.1 Single Outcome Agreement**

- 7.1.1** Under the November 2007 Concordat arrangements between the Scottish Government and Local Government, a Single Outcome Agreement between the Government and each local authority requires to be developed by 1 April 2008, effective from 2008/09. Single Outcome Agreements are based on an agreed set of national strategic objectives and outcomes underpinned by a range of national indicators and local outcomes. The aim of Single Outcome Agreement is to help deliver local contribution towards key national objectives and outcomes; ensure a more streamlined approach to external scrutiny and effective performance management. In addition, it is also the Government's intention that by 2009/10, Single Outcome Agreements be extended to include council's Community Planning Partners.
- 7.1.2** In view of the well established and robust Community Planning arrangements that exist within East Ayrshire, the Council, along with our Community Planning Partners, agreed to work immediately towards the development of a Community Planning Partnership Single Outcome Agreement for the East Ayrshire area, which would be effective from 1 April 2008, a year ahead of the Government's deadline. I am pleased to report that we achieved this.
- 7.1.3** East Ayrshire's Single Outcome Agreement reflects the Scottish Government's Strategic Direction, which fits very well with the six thematic action plans of our Community Plan and is structured around the national outcomes agreed in the Concordat. The local context is an important aspect that was considered in developing our Single Outcome Agreement, and the outcomes that the Community Planning Partners are seeking to achieve reflect local needs, circumstances and priorities.
- 7.1.4** Feedback from the Lead Scottish Government Director appointed to assist the Council in developing our Single Outcome Agreement, has been extremely positive and our approach to the matter has been very well received.
- 7.1.5** The Single Outcome Agreement was approved by both the Community Planning Partnership Board (1<sup>st</sup> Draft SOA) and the Cabinet (2<sup>nd</sup> Draft SOA) at their meetings on 10 and 18 June respectively, and I will today, in my capacity as Chair of the Community Planning Partnership Board, be signing the approved East Ayrshire Single Outcome Agreement for submission to the Scottish Government in advance of their deadline date of 30 June 2008. I would like to take the opportunity to thank all the Officers throughout the Community Planning Partnership who have contributed to the development of East Ayrshire's Single Outcome Agreement.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

- 8.1** Over the last 6 months I believe that the Cabinet has continued to deliver initiatives that I consider will benefit East Ayrshire and its communities. The successful delivery of the Single Outcome Agreement will be a significant aid in ensuring a cohesive approach to the delivery of local and national objectives and outcomes. I further believe that the changes to the decision making structure, and the introduction of the new Local Community Planning;

Equalities; and Children and Young Peoples Forums, will strengthen both the Community Planning structures and Community Engagement processes, which can only be to the benefit of the Council, its partners and the communities of East Ayrshire.

- 8.2** A major success in delivering these changes is the continued positive working relationship that exists between the political groups of East Ayrshire Council and the participation of Elected Members in terms of their roles within Cabinet and the Governance and Scrutiny arrangements. I would wish to express my appreciation to all Elected Members for their constructive participation in this process and it is my intention to continue to build on this success for the future.

**Councillor Douglas Reid**  
**Leader of the Council**  
**19 June 2008**