

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEETING - 24 JUNE 2010

SIX MONTHLY UPDATE ON CABINET ACTIVITIES

Report by the Leader of the Council

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 As my third year as Council Leader ends, I am pleased to present my six monthly report to Council. It has been another extremely busy six months for Cabinet and, once again, this report outlines some of the key issues and achievements considered by Cabinet during this period.

2. DEVELOPING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND THE DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURE

2.1 Decision-Making Structure

- 2.1.1 As Members will be aware a review of the decision-making structure was approved by Council at its meeting in December.

- 2.1.2 The aim of the review was to align Cabinet portfolio arrangements and associated external partnerships with the Council's strategic planning arrangements as set out under the new Community Planning themes and to provide for greater Elected Member involvement in the development of major Council policies and strategies.

- 2.1.3 I am confident that these new arrangements will further enhance our decision-making structure and partnership working and I remain firmly of the view that our arrangements provide for transparency of decision-making, accountable leadership and robust scrutiny of performance.

2.2 Community Engagement

- 2.2.1 The Local Community Planning Forums met jointly in February of this year to set their annual plan for 2010.

- 2.2.2 The first Forum of this year met in May at Netherthird Community Centre and was a joint Forum to contribute to the four-yearly review of the Community Plan, which I mention later in the report.

- 2.2.3 The joint meeting effectively engaged Forum members in the review process and afforded a real opportunity, at an early stage in the review process, for Forum representatives to contribute to the strategic direction for the Community Plan over the four year period 2011-15.

- 2.2.4 Looking ahead, the topics to be discussed by the Forums in August include: Town and Village Regeneration and their Sustainability, Alcohol Misuse, Kilmarnock Regeneration and Mental Health and Community Wellbeing.
- 2.2.5 Finally, in November there will be a joint Local Community Planning Forum meeting to discuss Community Safety.
- 2.2.6 As always, there is good debate, discussion and representation at the Forums and the actions arising from meetings will, be taken forward by Officers and reported to Cabinet, as appropriate.

2.3 Children and Young Persons' Forum

- 2.3.1 The Children and Young Person's Forum met in December 2009 in Netherthird Community Centre to consider transport issues.
- 2.3.2 The Forum also met in March this year in Shortlees Community Centre to consider anti-social behaviour. The Forum discussed scope for inter-generational work/joint events with Adult Forums, powers of agencies dealing with anti-social behaviour and youth and volunteering opportunities.
- 2.3.3 The annual 2009/10 workshop/review and teambuilding event for 2010/11 was held on Friday 11 June 2010 and the outcomes from that meeting are now being considered by officers for taking forward over the coming months.
- 2.3.4 This event provided the opportunity to discuss progress against all of the actions since the introduction of the Forum in 2008

2.4 Annual Equalities Week

- 2.4.1 I was delighted to attend, along with a number of other elected members, the recent annual Equalities Event at the Grand Hall. This brought together members of the Disability, Black Minority Ethnic, Older Peoples and Gender Networks with our partners from Strathclyde Police and NHS Ayrshire and Arran to set Equality priorities for the coming year. The event further demonstrated the joint commitment between partners to take the equalities agenda to the next level and this will be reflected in our Single Equality Scheme that is being developed placing equality at the heart of everything we do.

2.5 Community Planning and Single Outcome Agreement

2.5.1 Community Plan Four-yearly Review

As Members will recall, Community Planning Partners have given a commitment to carrying out a review of the Community Plan and related thematic Action Plans on a four-yearly basis. The next review requires to be carried out over 2010/11 to ensure that an updated Community Plan and revised set of Action Plans are ready for full implementation by 1 April 2011.

2.5.2 Cabinet agreed the structure for the review process at its meeting on 16 December 2009. The review process began with a Chief Officers' Seminar in January of this year. In addition, a dedicated seminar for Elected Members' was held on 29 April 2010. Both of these events afforded the opportunity for key decision makers to:

- inform the process for the four-yearly review of Community Planning;
- consider emerging agendas; and importantly
- consider the challenges presented to the Community Planning Partnership and individual organisations by the wider community and reflect on the way forward, particularly in relation to how enhanced partnership working could help address these challenges.

2.5.3 In addition to the Chief Officers' and Elected Members' seminars, a wide ranging engagement with Partner Agencies, the voluntary and business sectors and the wider community utilising a range of mechanism, including seminars, online surveys and a paper based consultation has been carried out.

2.5.4 In total, consultation and engagement was carried out with over 500 individuals and information on the proposed strategic priorities and planned local outcomes for the period 2011 – 2015 at the conclusion of Stage 1 of the review is presented to Council and appears as separate item on the agenda for today's meeting.

2.5.5 Stage 2 of the process, which involves updating the Community Plan review supplement and the preparation of new thematic Action Plans will be progressed between July and December 2010 to ensure that updated action plans are in place for implementation by 1 April 2011.

2.6 Single Outcome Agreement Improvement Plan

2.6.1 In March of this year, Cabinet considered the Single Outcome Agreement Improvement Action Plan which had been developed to address areas identified for improvement in the Single Outcome Agreement Annual Performance Report 2008/09.

2.6.2 The first Annual Performance Report for the East Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership Single Outcome Agreement was submitted to Cabinet for consideration and endorsement in September of last year.

2.6.3 Cabinet will recall that a total of 140 indicators were included in the SOA Annual Performance Report 2008/09. Progress as at March 2010 is summarised as follows:

- Improving Progress (86 indicators - 61.5%)
- Maintaining Progress (9 indicators - 6.5%)
- Improvement Required (31 indicators - 22.1%)
- Data Unavailable (14 indicators - 10%)

- 2.6.4** Areas for improvement within the SOA Annual Performance Report have been identified which will require to be addressed and taken forward by East Ayrshire Council either solely or on a partnership basis and early action is now being taken forward.
- 2.6.5** It is anticipated that the implementation of the actions within the SOA Improvement Plan will facilitate the achievement of the local outcomes in our three year SOA by March 2011. The second Annual Performance Report for the East Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership Single Outcome Agreement will be considered by Cabinet in September 2010.
- 2.7** The remainder of my report is presented along the lines of the new Cabinet portfolio arrangements.

3. STRATEGIC PLANNING, MANAGEMENT AND RESOURCES AND EQUALITIES

- 3.1** Before I move to report on the budget for 2010/11, I think it is important to reflect on the extensive community and employee engagement which took place prior to us setting this year's budget.
- 3.1.2** Over 1,000 communications were received from the community and employees and these helped formulate the final proposals agreed at Cabinet and Council. The extensive feedback from the engagement highlighted concerns about certain proposals and in the light of these changes were made.
- 3.1.3** This level of consultation was unprecedented in the lifetime of Local Government in this area. All of our meetings resulted in excellent two way communication, with a wide variety of questions raised and suggestions explored. Responses were, in the main, well informed, positive and supportive. In the unique national financial situation which prevails, this feedback from local people and employees was genuinely useful in fine tuning our budget. We will continue to develop and build on this approach for the budget process for 2011/12 and beyond.

3.2 Revenue Budget 2010/11-2012/13

- 3.2.1** In February 2010, the Cabinet presented to Council this Administration's third budget. For the third consecutive year Council Tax has been frozen at 2007 levels and tax payers will be given the opportunity to spread payments over 12 months instead of 10.
- 3.2.2** Whilst achieving a full year's savings package of £7M the new budget also makes available resources to build on progress against the Council's three priorities of building new council houses, regenerating our town centres and improving educational attainment.

- 3.3.3** The regeneration and revitalisation of Kilmarnock, Cumnock and Galston will continue and in a move to secure the area's future, an additional £300,000 will be made available for activities aimed at stimulating job creation, supporting existing businesses and new investment to the area, in advance of the closure of the Johnnie Walker plant in 2012. Scottish Government has matched our commitment thereby creating a resource equivalent of £600,000 over three years.
- 3.3.4** We have made good progress against our commitment to reduce class sizes to 18 or less in primaries 1 to 3.
- 3.3.5** The budget also makes provision for free pre-school education to be made available for all children from their third birthday which affirms our commitment to our jointly devised Early Years Framework.
- 3.3.6** Finally, I was most pleased that £2M was allocated to repair the extensive damage caused to roads and pavements by the severe weather conditions we experienced over the winter and good progress is being made to take this work forward.

3.4 Efficiency Strategy

- 3.4.1** In May this year Cabinet approved a strategy to review the Council's revenue budget with the aim of continuously driving up efficiency levels and ensuring that resources are applied effectively to achieve the Council's key strategic outcomes.
- 3.4.2** The strategy will consist of a series of strands each containing a number of related reviews.
- 3.4.3** Strand number 1 - Business Review Programme. The Business Review Programme will take forward the issues raised by the community and voluntary sector and employees during the 2010/11 budget consultation engagement process.
- 3.4.4** Strand Number 2 - Budget Management and Review. An examination of individual budget lines will be undertaken on a service by service basis to establish the nature, purpose and relevance of expenditure transactions within each Department. All expenditure will require to be linked in terms of relevance to the Council's themes and key priorities.
- 3.4.5** Strand Number 3 - Fairer Scotland Fund Review. Ringfencing of the Fairer Scotland Fund was removed in 2009/10. Although the fund is no longer ringfenced, the total Fairer Scotland Grant received in 2010/11 has been allocated in line with previous years and projects will be reviewed to ensure that they remain the most effective and efficient way to achieve specific outcomes in the future.

- 3.4.6** Strand Number 4 - Budget and Performance Review. A Working Group of 8 Councils managed by East Ayrshire has been established to review service budgets and performance and a plan of work based on identifying comparative spend in performance and establishing how specific Councils can maintain low costs and high performance in certain services has been established.
- 3.4.7** Strand Number 5 - Workforce Planning Review. The spending reductions resulting from the Efficiency Strategy will undoubtedly impact on the current workforce given the proportion of the budget which salary costs represent. This work stream has been developed to manage the reduction of workforce numbers in line with the planned reduction in financial resources over the lifecycle of the spending review and beyond.
- 3.4.8** Strand Number 6 - Continuing Engagement Arrangements. As previously mentioned earlier in my report a new and enhanced consultation and engagement process was introduced in respect of the arrangements for consulting on the 2010/11 Draft Revenue Budget. All of these meetings resulted in excellent two way communication and to ensure that we build on and maximise the benefit from our engagement with both our employees and the wider community and voluntary sector, Cabinet has agreed to continue and enhance this type of engagement.

3.5 Health and Safety

- 3.5.1** Health and Safety is paramount in all that the Council does and I know elected members continue to take such matters very seriously. As such, this has been an important area of activity for Cabinet over the past six months.
- 3.5.2** The Council continues to work closely with Peter Ralston, Principal Consultant of Chalker Health and Safety, who assisted us to prepare the Health and Safety Improvement Plan which was approved by Cabinet in December 2009.
- 3.5.3** At its meeting on 12 May 2010, following a seminar for all elected members, Cabinet received an update report on progress against the Improvement Plan, noting that very good progress had been made.
- 3.5.4** Addressing the issues identified by the Ralston Review strengthens the Council's arrangements in respect of meeting its statutory obligations to provide a safe and healthy working environment for its employees.

3.6 Housing Asset Service

- 3.6.1** Earlier this year, Cabinet considered an update report to the Housing Service Plan that confirmed the establishment of the Housing Asset Service with responsibility for housing repairs and improvement works.

3.6.2 The new unit is the future for our repairs service and brings together all the functions associated with the Council's Landlord responsibilities to maintain and improve the Council's Housing Stock to achieve the Scottish Housing Quality Standard and the management of in-house delivery workforce.

3.6.3 The establishment of the Housing Asset Service will help the Council deliver the necessary improvements in housing repairs, strengthening capacity to respond to the issues of challenge and review and demonstrate best value.

4. PROMOTING LIFELONG LEARNING

4.1 Early Education and Childcare Funding to External Agencies 2010/11

4.1.1 Following on from the budget setting exercise for 2010/11, a review of Partner Provider provision for early education and child care was undertaken. This looked at areas where there was sufficient local authority provision to provide a place for all three and four year olds where a parent wishes one, and we have asked for a review of management arrangements in nursery schools adjacent to primary schools.

4.1.2 In April of this year, Cabinet approved funding of £96,184.73 to out-of-school care services for 2010/11. These groups provide out-of-school care services within 16 locations and support over 900 families.

4.2 School Estate

4.2.1 Progress continues with our work to improve our School Estate. The Council has an established vision for its School Estate which will ensure the delivery of a modern curriculum in school buildings which are suitable for purpose.

4.2.2 Previous school estate management plans have outlined the key themes of priority to be considered when improving our educational facilities:

- Reducing surplus capacity.
- Addressing maintenance issues.
- Meeting statutory requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) legislation.
- Improving property flexibility.
- Supporting a Curriculum for Excellence.

4.2.3 We continue to invest significant resources into our school buildings in a prioritised manner, recognising the long term nature of the modernisation work and we remain committed to achieving a school estate which will provide positive opportunities for learning and teaching.

4.2.4 The Council received confirmation that Gargieston Primary and Nursery Class would receive a funding contribution through the Scottish Futures Trust for a new build facility at the existing site. This was most recently reported to Cabinet at its meeting on 16 June 2010 when proposals for necessary arrangements for decant of Gargieston Primary School and Nursery Class during the construction period were considered.

4.2.5 Cabinet also considered the outcomes from the public consultation regarding proposals for Crossroads Primary School at its meeting on 16 June 2010 and I am pleased that this was further considered by the Governance and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 18 June 2010 prior to Cabinet taking a final view on the proposals.

4.2.8 We constantly strive to improve the facilities in which teachers and pupils work and learn. This ensures that buildings can meet the needs of the formal curriculum and adapt to accommodate the flexibility which is required. Our long term vision is to constantly improve the service offered to children and young people and this will allow the citizens and staff of East Ayrshire meet the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

4.3 Schools' Alcohol Education Co-ordinator

4.3.1 Members will recall that following the development of the East Ayrshire Community Planning Alcohol and Drugs Pledge in April 2008, and given the significant impact alcohol has on individuals, families and communities, Cabinet agreed a number of actions including approval of the post of Schools' Alcohol Education Co-ordinator.

4.3.2 The remit of the Co-ordinator includes the development of an evidenced based, comprehensive and progressive Personal and Social Education (PSE) programme on substance misuse for pupils S1 to S6. The programme will ensure that there is a consistent message being given to all our young people. The programme has a focus on young people from aged 14 to 18 however, links were made during the course of the programme with primary schools especially at key transition stages.

4.3.3 A Peer Education programme on substance misuse is currently being piloted in James Hamilton Academy. S6 peer educators have been researching drugs, alcohol and tobacco. Workshop sessions from a variety of partners are currently being delivered to senior pupils. The programme is being evaluated and if it proves successful, this Peer Education programme will be rolled out to other schools within East Ayrshire. I look forward to a report coming to a future meeting of Cabinet, providing an evaluation of these important initiatives.

5. DELIVERING COMMUNITY REGENERATION

5.1 Strathclyde Partnership for Transport's Transport Outcome Report for East Ayrshire Council 2010/11

5.1.1 In May of this year Cabinet approved Strathclyde Partnership for Transport's Transport Priorities for East Ayrshire as set out in the Transport Outcome Report for 2010/11 as detailed below.

- Development of park and ride facilities at Kilmarnock, Kilmaurs, Dunlop and Stewarton.
- Enhancing the strategic road network.
- Developing proposals for a rail station at Mauchline.
- Improving transport connections for regeneration areas.
- Assisting East Ayrshire Council to develop and implement proposals for decriminalised parking enforcement.
- Improvement to transport and rural areas.
- Promoting sustainable/active travel in East Ayrshire.
- Improving access to health care facilities in East Ayrshire and across the West of Scotland.

5.1.2 The implementation of the above outcomes will improve transport connections locally, enhance the transport network and encourage more sustainable travel choices.

5.2 Zero Waste Fund: Proposed Food and Plastics Collection Trial

5.2.1 I am pleased to report that the Council has to date achieved and exceeded all European and National legislative waste obligations.

5.2.2 Recycling rates are sitting at 43%, well above national targets, and the Council has been praised by the Scottish Government for its success and we are now working towards achieving our ambitious recycling target of 45% by 2011.

5.2.3 Cabinet has agreed to introduce a pilot scheme for the collection of organic kitchen waste and mixed plastics. Cleansing Services conducted a waste analysis last summer and discovered that by weight, 25.67% and 20.46% of waste collected was food waste and mixed plastics respectively.

5.2.4 Consultations have taken place with householders and there is good support in the community for this initiative. Working with our local residents we will continue to make our area even greener.

5.3 Kickstart Council House Building Bid Submission

5.3.1 Members will be aware that the construction of 10 new affordable houses at MacDonald Drive in Kilmarnock is now underway. This development is phase one of the Council's affordable home building programme and will provide suitable housing for older/ambulant disabled people.

5.3.2 The new homes will allow the Council to provide smaller affordable housing suitable for our aging population, will help to replace stock lost through Right to Buy sales and allow the allocation of larger houses to families who wish to remain within their own communities. Not only are we meeting the needs of our elderly residents but we are working to alleviate the pressures on the affordable housing waiting lists.

5.3.3 A second phase of funding from the Scottish Government's new Council House building fund has allowed a total of 40 houses will be developed at four sites within Kilmarnock and Fenwick. This will allow us to pursue our plans for the creation of sustainable communities throughout the area.

5.3.4 All the houses will be built to Housing for Varying Needs standards and the Council has appointed Atrium Initiatives, a subsidiary of Atrium Homes, to manage the build process for the first phase.

5.4 Core Funding Payments to External Partnerships

5.4.1 Cabinet earlier this year agreed funding for various organisations and projects which contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the East Ayrshire Community Plan, particularly supporting the key theme of Developing Community Regeneration. These projects included the Darvel Music Festival, the Mauchline Holy Fair and Cumnock Highland Games.

5.4.2 These are locally inspired and locally managed annual events which not only contribute significantly to the life of their respective communities, but also play a major part in attracting visitors to East Ayrshire and I am delighted that Cabinet agreed to continue to support these events this year. Mindful of the financial situation and for the need to try to maintain these important events, I have asked officers to engage with the local organisations at an early stage to discuss arrangements for future years.

5.5 East Ayrshire Local Development Plan - Development Plan Scheme 2010

5.5.1 In March of this year, Cabinet approved a Development Plan Scheme and Participation Statement detailing the anticipated timetable and participation procedures that should be put in place regarding the preparation of a new Local Development Plan for East Ayrshire.

5.5.2 The main change from last year's Development Plan Scheme is that the timetable has been amended to reflect the status of the alteration to the East Ayrshire Local Plan which is currently at examination stage. It is proposed that the new Local Development Plan will be adopted in August 2014.

5.5.3 One further change from the Development Plan Scheme approved in 2009 is that it is no longer proposed to invite interested parties to suggest issues for consideration and sites for inclusion in the main issues report in advance of its publication. Instead, the main issues report will put forward a number of different options for development and all interested parties will have the opportunity to comment during the consultation period for this document.

5.6 Town Centre Regeneration Fund Projects

5.6.1 In February of this year Cabinet received an update on progress with three projects funded by the Scottish Government's Town Centre Regeneration Fund for Kilmarnock, Cumnock and Galston Town Centres.

5.6.2 Members had previously been advised that a total of £749,000 had been approved for the Cumnock: Creating Civic Space Project and £250,000 for the Galston - Achieving Sustainable Regeneration Project.

5.6.3 Members will also be aware that the Kilmarnock - Connecting Places Project had been successful and had been awarded £1,156,000. This project aims to greatly improve the environment and pedestrian connections between Kilmarnock Railway Station and core retailing area through the introduction of high quality environmental and streetscape improvements. Improved surfaces, lighting, signage and street furniture will better connect the railway station to John Finnie Street, Portland Street, Strand Street, Bank Street and King Street.

5.6.4 The Cumnock: Creating Civic Space Project will meet the identified need for improved access to the Town Centre, provision of an attractive, high quality outdoor public space and the removal of a vacant building on a key site. The project includes the creation of a high quality streetscape improvement project to enhance the setting of the Category C(S) Listed Cumnock Town Hall, the demolition of a vacant and derelict former bingo hall in Glaisnock Street and the formation of an improved access into the proposed new car park on the site of the former Council yard.

5.6.5 Galston - Achieving Sustainable Regeneration Project - the successful Galston project aims to create a new landscaped public car park adjacent to the Burn Anne flood defences and enable demolition and clearance at a prominent derelict site in the Town Centre. Community Safety issues will be addressed through the installation of CCTV and additional lighting to the car park area and church lane adjacent.

5.6.6 The Kilmarnock and the Cumnock projects sits within the Council and its partner's strategic priorities in relation to Town Centre Regeneration. Within the Community Plan, all three projects meet the aims and aspirations of the Delivering Community Regeneration Action Plan 2009-2011. The projects are imbedded in the Council's Integrated Regeneration Strategy and link directly to Scottish Government's national outcomes and local outcomes articulated through the East Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership Single Outcome Agreement.

6. IMPROVING COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELLBEING

6.1 Social Work Sustainability

- 6.1.1** Members will recall that Cabinet has agreed a work programme to modernise working practices and service models within Social Work to address service pressures within the resources available to the Council and our partners. The overall aim is to provide a foundation that will deliver sustainable Social Work services over the period 2009/2014, and beyond.
- 6.1.2** Initial reports to Cabinet in July and October 2008 provided detail of the service pressures on Social Work and consequential budget implications for the Council. As a result, four specific work streams, to be addressed as a matter of priority, were identified, including: Home Care Services, Adult Services, Children's Services and Administrative and Management Support Services.
- 6.1.3** A schematic timeline for key actions and regular progress reports have been routinely submitted to Cabinet over 2009. A further update report was submitted to Cabinet on 19 May 2010, with progress summarised as follows:

6.2 Home Care Services

- 6.2.1** A programme of change and improvement is being undertaken in Home Care Services to deliver high quality sustainable services. The principal themes are improved working practices; increased fairness and equity in application of eligibility criteria; and review of the management and delivery model.
- 6.2.2** It is anticipated that with continued focus on the change programme, the objective of delivering a sustainable service within the resources target will be achieved within timescales.

6.3 Adult Services

- 6.3.1** The principal themes of the change programme in respect of Adult Services are day services for people with learning disabilities; support models; and accommodation models including transition.
- 6.3.2** Work has been undertaken with housing to identify suitable properties to develop modern models of provision suited to service user's needs. As a result, proposals are being progressed to expand current provision by the identification of housing with a new and existing capacity across East Ayrshire. In total, over 20 new tenancies have been identified for 2010/11.

6.4 Children's Services

6.4.1 Both the SWIA performance inspection of social work services published in 2009 and the joint inspection of services to protect children in East Ayrshire have confirmed that the arrangements made to strengthen management structures are positive developments contributing to more effective service delivery.

6.4.2 In order to ensure that our young people receive the best support at the right time, significant additional resources have been allocated to Children and Families over the next three years. This action will secure a future for young people now, with early interventions designed to release resources over the longer-term.

6.5 East Ayrshire Child Protection Committee Annual Report 2008/09

6.5.1 Cabinet was updated at the end of last year on the development of the East Ayrshire Child Protection Committee Annual Report and Business Plan which also incorporated the Action Plan for 2009/10.

6.5.2 The Annual Report summarised activity in 2008/09 and set out achievements which included the:

- implementation of the Getting it Right for Every Child group which is a multi-agency group with responsibility for information sharing and identification of a lead agency to follow-up on concerns identified about a child or young person;
- implementation of a risk assessment training programme for Social Work staff, which has since been incorporated into the training calendar;
- the success of the Child Protection Conference which adopted the theme of Corporate Parenting; and
- hosting of a statistical seminar on a multi-agency basis to interrogate information and develop improved understanding of the needs of children and young people in East Ayrshire. This led to independent research being commissioned.

6.5.3 The Business Plan covered 2008-2011 which included a specific Action Plan for 2009/10. This included work relating to:

- further improving public information;
- developing policy, procedures and protocols;
- further improving management information;
- further developing our quality assurance and self evaluation processes; and
- engaging with children, young people and other members of the community about awareness of child protection.

6.6 Joint Inspection of Services to Protect Children and Young People in the East Ayrshire Area

6.6.1 The second joint Inspection of Services to Protect Children and Young People took place in October/November last year, with the findings being published in March 2010.

6.6.2 Our key strengths arising from the inspection were highlighted as:

- providing support early to prevent difficulties arising or increasing;
- staff working well together to keep children safe;
- trusting relationships with staff;
- commitment by staff to reviewing their work to improve services; and
- strengthened leadership and management of children in Social Work Services.

6.6.3 Specific examples of good practice highlighted were:

- staff effectively supporting parents to develop their confidence and skills in caring for pre-school aged children;
- services and opportunities making a positive difference to the life of young carers affected by parental substance misuse; and
- improved wellbeing of young people living in residential children's homes through taking part in leisure activities.

6.6.4 The following areas were identified as requiring further development and as a result Cabinet agreed that the East Ayrshire Child Protection Committee progress the improvement actions, as part of the overall business planning approach. These include:

- consistently involving health staff in the early stages of planning the response to child protection concerns;
- further strengthening child protection planning to identify and monitor improvement in children's health and wellbeing; and
- continuing to review work jointly, focusing more on improved outcomes for children.

6.6.5 The overall assessment by the inspection was very positive with the evaluation confirming that the Council was rated as either very good or good in 4 of the 6 assessed quality indicators.

7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Cabinet has, over the past six months, dealt with a range of strategic and operational activity. I am confident that the decisions we have made and the initiatives and programmes we have supported will continue to have a lasting and positive impact on all of our communities and also assist in the delivery of our three strategic priorities of:

- Regenerating our Town Centres;
- Improving Educational Attainment; and
- Building New Council Housing.

7.1.2 It is important that everyone across the Council continues to play an active part in making our services as efficient and effective as possible. This will assist us meet the challenges we will need to address in the months to come as we gain an increased understanding of the impact of the recession and the wider spending review. To this end, the steps we have taken to ensure ongoing engagement with employees and the wider community as part of our efficiency strategy will be important building blocks for the Council as we work towards our 2011/12 budget.

7.1.3 Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to thank all of our Council Officers for the range of work developed and presented to Cabinet over the last six months and as always, to Elected Members of the Council for their continued positive participation in all elements of the decision-making structure.

**Councillor Douglas Reid
Leader of the Council**

18 June 2010