

## **EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

### **GOVERNANCE AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 3 APRIL 2009**

#### **POSITION STATEMENT: MEMBER OFFICER WORKING GROUP: OPTION APPRAISAL - REPLACEMENT CHILDREN'S HOUSE: CABINET 04 MARCH 2009**

#### **Joint Report by Executive Director of Educational and Social Services and Executive Head of Finance and Asset Management**

### **1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To describe for members of the Governance and Scrutiny Committee the Departmental position on the option appraisal for a replacement Children's House.

### **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Council has legal responsibilities for the safety and protection of vulnerable children arising from the Children (Scotland) Act, 1995 and associated legislation. The particular group for these purposes are described as "looked after and accommodated" children, for whom the Council is their corporate parent, along with other agencies such as the NHS. There is a further group of young people who may, for whatever reason require to be temporarily housed because of their particular circumstances at a point of time, but who have not been subject to any formal measures of care in the legal sense. These young people are the most vulnerable in our society, having reached a point on their lives where their natural parents or family are no longer able to care for them.
- 2.2 The Council, following a Best Value Review of services for looked after and accommodated children which was finalised in 2004, has long been conscious that its facilities then existing at Bellsford House and Kilmaurs were no longer fit for purpose and required to be renewed. It was further recognised that the geographic distribution of facilities, with none in the south of the authority, was proving a barrier to keeping children as close to their home community as possible. As a consequence, a new children's house was planned and opened in Auchinleck. This new house, Sunnyside, became available for young people over the summer of 2008, and was a replacement for Bellsford House , which closed at the time of the move.
- 2.3 A replacement for Kilmaurs therefore remains outstanding, against a background where the imperative is to provide accommodation in the Kilmarnock area – the community from which most of the children originate. In keeping with best practice, it is known to be important that such facilities should, wherever possible, have access to town centre services while simultaneously being in balanced residential communities. This is important background to the option appraisal process. For similar best practice reasons, it is now accepted that the ideal size for such a house is for 6 young people,

making it comparable in size to a large family home, while still retaining an element of economy of scale. This is a development in thinking that took place during the option appraisal process and which was reflected in paragraph 7.1 of the Cabinet Report.

- 2.4** For completeness, members are asked to note the existence of a third children's house, run by the Council, which is at Montgomery Place, Kilmarnock. This is a 4-bedded facility which provides services for a group of young people with particular social needs.

### **3. THE OPTION APPRAISAL PROCESS**

- 3.1** Although option appraisal has been used as a management tool for some 10 years or more in the Council, the process applied to consideration of this issue had a number of important new features, not apparent in previous exercises to site such facilities:

- It was seen as part of the Total Project Management and PRINCE 2 approach for project management, formally adopted by the Corporate Management Team in October 2007. This represents best practice.
- The process was approached corporately as a joint venture between the Department of Finance and Asset Management and the Department of Educational and Social Services reflected in the Cabinet report.
- A rigorous scoring system covering strategic (40%), Asset Management (10%) and Financial Assessment (50%) was used, and the results made available for Cabinet and public scrutiny.
- A Member/Officer group was established to deliberate on the issue.
- There was cross-party representation on the member/officer working group.

- 3.2** The Cabinet report that was presented on 4 March not only summarised the details of the deliberations within the option appraisal process, but also included much of the detail. This detail included the minutes of the four meetings of the member-officer group together with further information such as location maps. Each Appendix to the report also included detailed information on the 3 short-listed sites under the strategic, asset management and financial headings.

- 3.3** Against this background of detailed work and presentation of information, of the short-listed sites one, Beech Avenue, scored less than the other two and was therefore discounted. The MacDonald Drive site and Grassyards Roads sites had scored equally in the process, and from this perspective would be equally viable from the perspectives of the Department of Finance and Asset Management and Department of Educational and Social Services. In debate in Cabinet, new information was provided by the Head of Roads, and comments were heard from local members, resulting in the eventual decision of Cabinet in favour of the Grassyards Road site.

- 3.4** Members would wish to be aware that although there is a formal requirement to conduct public consultations from a service point of view, on the location of some new facilities – notably schools – there is no equivalent requirement for a facility such as a children’s house. This is in keeping with the scale, nature and purpose of the facility. To reflect this, there is no known precedent for such public consultation and the houses at Montgomery Place, Sunnyside, or Berryknowe for older people, were planned and built without such exercises taking place. Notably, too these facilities have not experienced, nor generated, any community-based issues since their inception. This notwithstanding, there is clearly an opportunity for the community to be consulted as part of present planning processes. The Department of Educational and Social Services has also given a commitment to work and engage with communities in the following stages of this project.

#### **4 POLICY/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1** The Council has a clear legal obligation to make effective provision for this group of vulnerable children and young people under the Children (Scotland) Act, 1995. The quality of this provision is monitored by the Care Commission and as part of the work of other agencies such as the Social Work Inspection Agency (SWIA) and Audit Scotland.
- 4.2** Provision of quality facilities which demonstrate respect for children as important members of our society and communities is central to the Council’s approach to corporate parenting.
- 4.3** It has always been the Council’s policy, as reflected in the regular reports to Committee on Outwith Placements, that children should be kept as near to their home communities so far as possible. The approach taken in identifying the site of this children’s house has allowed for this.

#### **5. COMMUNITY PLANNING IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1** The development of the Children’s House will involve Community Planning Partners. Moreover the provision of this house will be a direct contribution to the safety of our young people. A proper home environment can only contribute to their confidence, and ultimately their lifelong learning and ability to contribute positively throughout their lives to society. Aims which are central to the Community Plan.

#### **6. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1** The risks associated with consideration of this matter are identified in paragraph 5 above.

#### **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1** The financial implications of each option were set out in the Cabinet paper of 04 March 2009.

## **8. CONCLUSIONS**

- 8.1** This is an important service both for the Council and the young people it is intended to benefit. It has been planned now for some 5 years. The option appraisal process and the involvement of the member-officer group represents a new level of rigour and attention to detail for the planning of a Council facility. Every stage has been exposed to open scrutiny with best practice being identified and used.
- 8.2** The group of young people for whom this service is intended have a high level of vulnerability. There is general agreement that they deserve better facilities than the Council is currently able to provide. Such are the needs of this group that further, prolongation of this issue would run counter to their interests.

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and Social Services

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GRS/GRS

31 March 2009

### **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**Nil**

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