

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE – 9 JANUARY 2007

SCOTTISH SMALL TOWNS REPORT 2007- 2013

Report by the Acting Executive Director of Development and Property Services

1. PURPOSES OF REPORT

1.1 The purposes of this report are to:-

- (a) Inform the Committee of the “Scottish Small Towns Report 2007-2013”; and
- (b) Highlight the key findings and recommendations contained in the Report in particular those that relate to the circumstances of East Ayrshire Council.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 In September 2004 the South of Scotland Alliance (SoSA) held a Conference on the theme “Small Towns Under Threat”. Following the Conference a Task Group was established with a remit to prepare the evidence base to:-

- Highlight the issues and challenges facing Scotland’s small towns
- Clarify responsibilities in the Scottish Executive for small towns
- Make the case to the Scottish Executive for a Small Towns Review
- Bring together good practice case studies on the development and regeneration of small towns.

2.2 The Task Group was supported by COSLA and was administered on behalf of SoSA by Scottish Borders Council with the involvement of Dumfries and Galloway.

3. SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

3.1 The Task Group gathered socio-economic and environmental data from a variety of sources including by using a local authority survey of small towns with a population of between 2,000 and 20,000. The return from East Ayrshire related to Auchinleck and Newmilns.

3.2 The Report identifies four categories of small towns:-

- Those within 30 miles of cities with good transport links and a relatively large commuter population
- Declining traditional industrial towns which are on the edge of cities or are relatively remote from city influences
- Those beyond the influence of cities and other major towns and performing the main market towns /service centre roles for their surrounding areas
- Seaports and service centres that that are located on the islands

Key findings of the research are presented under the headings of Population, Economic, Social, Physical, Development and Regeneration Initiatives and Scottish Executive and National Agencies.

3.3 The conclusions of the report include:-

- Successful and dynamic cities can benefit from dynamic small towns within their hinterland. Where small towns are situated within city-regions they should be expected to play a full part in realising the full potential of that region and not simply provide for recreational or dormitory roles.
- Whole town strategies should be prepared for each small town. It is suggested that opportunities for true joint working are not focused at the community level and that small towns offer a great opportunity to re-invigorate Community Planning at the local level and release the capacity of individuals to help themselves. Every small town should have a “Whole Town Strategy” which is holistic and covers economic, social, physical and environmental factors, opportunities and needs. This would position the town in the wider economy and provide direction.
- National Agencies cannot effectively address local issues identified in Local Community Planning Partnerships and are increasingly directed to national priorities and targets. It is also suggested that the Scottish Indices of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) are too coarse to register local inequality in small towns.
- There is considerable good practice in relation to small towns and regeneration across Scotland but there is no consistent process to share or learn from and build on best practice.

3.4 The report sets out a strategic framework with 7 Aims and 34 related Recommendations.

The framework contains the proposal for a new funding instrument to support the development and regeneration of small towns.

The recommendations contained in the Report include calling on national agencies to make better use of existing resources to support small towns, a proposal to change the fiscal regime to facilitate private sector investment and requiring public and private sector investment to be better integrated in supporting the regeneration of small towns and a proposal to develop a mechanism to supplement the SIMD to better identify the needs of rural areas and small towns.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 The Small Towns Report is particularly relevant to the circumstances of East Ayrshire. The report identifies the issues that are faced by many local communities including those in the former industrial/mining towns and presents a range of recommendations that are appropriate for further consideration.

4.2 The report is relevant at many levels e.g.

- From a Policy perspective it is vital that the Scottish Executive provides a policy continuum between cities and rural areas. This issue is also relevant to the current consultation on Structural Funds where the Scottish Executive has identified priorities that support Urban Areas and traditional Rural Areas but perhaps not rural areas that exhibit urban problems – which are the problems faced by many of the small towns in East Ayrshire.
- The recommendations regarding the preparation of “Whole Town Strategies” are relevant to the ongoing review of the East Ayrshire Community Plan
- The issue of Small Towns is also relevant to the ongoing Review of the Ayrshire Economic Forums “Ayrshire: Scotland’s Western Gateway” that will consider the future role of Ayrshire in the context of the Scottish Executives Regeneration Policy Statement “People and Place” and also the City Region debate.

4.3 The Report has been considered by the CoSLA Leaders who have agreed to

- (i) Give their broad support to the recommendations contained in the Small Towns Report; and
- (ii) Invite SoSA to give further consideration to their proposals relating to funding.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

7. **COMMUNITY PLANNING AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 One of the recommendations contained in the Report is that “Whole Town Strategies should be prepared for each small town.” It is suggested that opportunities for true joint working are not focused at the community level and that small towns offer a great opportunity to re-invigorate Community Planning at the local level and release the capacity of individuals to help themselves. Every small town should have a “Whole Town Strategy” which is holistic and covers economic, social, physical and environmental factors, opportunities and needs. This would position the town in the wider economy and provide direction.

7.2 The possible implications of this recommendation would require to be considered by the Community Planning Partnership in the first instance.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 It is recommended that the Committee:-

- (i) Support, in principle, the recommendations contained in the Scottish Small Towns Report 2007-2013, as being particularly relevant to East Ayrshire; and
- (ii) Invite the East Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership to consider the implications of implementing the recommendations contained in the report in particular those regarding the preparation of "Whole Town Strategies" for each small town and to report back to a future meeting of the Committee; and
- (iii) Otherwise, note the contents of this report.

James T Kane
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20 December 2006
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List of Background Papers

Scottish Small Towns Report 2007-2013

Members wishing further information on this report or wishing to view the Background Paper should contact David Hewet, Senior Policy Adviser (Tel: 01563 554680).

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