

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE: 8 FEBRUARY 2006

RURAL SERVICE PRIORITY AREAS

Report by Depute Chief Executive / Executive Director of Corporate Support

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update Members on developments in relation to the Rural Service Priority Areas (RSPAs).

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Scottish Executive in a letter to the Chief Executive dated 25 January 2005, advised the Council of its intentions to establish a number of RSPAs nationally in order to further address the Rural Closing the Opportunity Gap (CtOG) target:

“By 2008, improve service delivery in rural areas so that agreed improvements in accessibility and quality are achieved for key services in remote and rural communities”.

- 2.2 Within East Ayrshire, two data zones were originally targeted as RSPAs, namely:

- SO1001269 – ‘Dalmellington, New Cumnock’
- SO1001276 – New Cumnock.

- 2.3 The Council, on behalf of Community Planning Partners, submitted a request for two additional RSPA areas, namely, Catrine and Patna. After further negotiations with the Executive, the Catrine area (data zone SO1001312) received full RSPA designation.

- 2.4 The above information was reported to Policy and Resources Committee on 31 May 2005, including the securing of the additional data zone of Catrine on 20 September 2005.

- 2.5 In addition to the above targeted RSPA boundaries, broader geographical base areas can be included in the RSPA designation. These areas are known as intermediary boundaries. It is hoped that the Patna area will be included as part of the RSPA intermediary boundary designation and discussions in this regard are ongoing with the Executive. Copies of the maps highlighting the RSPA areas and intermediary boundaries agreed to date are available in the Members’ Information Point.

3. RESEARCH INTO SERVICE ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY IN RURAL SCOTLAND

- 3.1 The Scottish Executive agreed that local service improvement targets in each Rural Service Priority Area require to be agreed with Community Planning Partners. Research into Service Accessibility and Quality in Rural Scotland was commissioned by the Scottish Executive to inform the discussion between the Scottish Executive and Community Planning Partners in this process.
- 3.2 The objectives of the research were to identify the priorities of people living in rural areas regarding key services for them and their community, and how access to, and the quality of these services might be improved. The objectives were met through a literature review designed to source and assess the information, which already existed from previous research and consultation in these areas, followed by primary qualitative research undertaken through a programme of group discussions in each of the selected RSPAs.
- 3.3 Within East Ayrshire, the particular area to which the following issues relate is the rural area between New Cumnock and Dalmellington. It is anticipated that similar issues will arise from the Catrine area, however further research has been conducted in the Catrine Area by the Scottish Executive. The results of this are awaited.

4. SUMMARY OF SERVICE PRIORITIES AND ISSUES IDENTIFIED FOR EAST AYRSHIRE

- 4.1 The direct primary research revealed that, although there were local issues raised in terms of service priorities, access and quality in each of the locations, there was a broad consensus across all regions regarding what the priority, quality and access issues were for residents in rural Scotland. These are shown below and represent those services prioritised for improvement by all, or almost all, of the groups.
- access to **public transport** which included buses, trains and planes (routes, timetables, integration of different services) and rising cost of private transport (fuel, tax, lack of petrol stations)
 - access to **health centres, GPs and emergency services** (limited opening hours, seniority of staff, withdrawal of other services such as mid-wife and health visitors, dental services)
 - access to **other emergency services** (withdrawal of the 'local bobby', longer travel times for the fire service etc)
 - access to **refuse collection and recycling** (frequency, high journey times) and poor quality ('poorly' implemented or badly communicated)
 - access to **post offices and retail shops** (shops closing, limited choice, high travel times as a result, loss of community centre)
 - quality of **road maintenance** and perceived short-termist view on maintenance ('patching up', heavy lorries)
 - access to and quality of **communication services** (poor reception and service quality of telephone, mobiles, broadband, television)
 - access and quality of **utilities, water and energy** (poor quality of product, poor service from staff, belief that rural locations were unimportant)
 - access to, and quality of, **housing** was also a concern in a sizeable minority of the communities consulted.

- 4.2 The particular service priorities and general issues, which were identified through the East Ayrshire workshop (Dalmellington/New Cumnock area), in Cumnock on Monday 11 July 2005 were as follows: Bank; Dentist; Energy; GP Surgery; Police and Police Criminal Justice System; Public Transport; Refuse Collection; Road Maintenance; Communications – phones and mobile phones; and Water Supply. A total of 11 individuals participated.
- 4.3 General service related issues raised at the Workshop comprised of:
- an underlying acceptance that many choose to live in a rural community, where there is poorer access;
 - a real need for service improvement but demands quite basic; and
 - very realistic and practical demands, often reinstating services to ‘how they were’.
- 4.4 In addition, a number of East Ayrshire projects/initiatives were identified within the report as providing innovative solutions, including: yipworld.com, the CHIP Van, the Dalmellington Area Centre, Coalfield Community Transport and ‘Wheels2Work’.

5. PROPOSED KEY SERVICE PRIORITIES FOR EAST AYRSHIRE

- 5.1 To facilitate the discussion with the Scottish Executive, the Community Planning Joint Officers’ Group established a short term sub group, comprising representation from the Council’s Community Planning and Partnership Unit and Communities Scotland. In order to identify the key priority issues, Officers cross referenced the issues raised from the consultation exercise with the Community Plan and the Regeneration Outcome Agreement, where appropriate. In addition, comment on the identified issues was sought from relevant Partners.
- 5.2 The following key service priorities were identified and these received approval/endorsement, in principle, from Scottish Executive representatives and were endorsed by Community Planning Partners on 20 December 2005. The key service priorities were identified as follows:
- diversionary activity for young people, in particular innovative methods of delivery in rural areas such as mobile units/multi use games areas;
 - community transport, particularly in relation to access to services such as hospitals; and
 - the development of health facilities in New Cumnock.
- 5.3 The above proposals are currently being investigated in order to work up a draft submission to the Scottish Executive by 31 January 2006, the content of which will be subject to endorsement by both Community Planning Partners and Elected Members.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

- 6.1 The Scottish Executive representatives stressed that monitoring should fit with existing mechanisms, adding additional baseline information and outcomes relevant to this activity.
- 6.2 It is therefore proposed that within East Ayrshire, this will mean reporting this additional activity within the Community Planning Annual Performance Report.

7. THE WAY FORWARD

- 7.1 Confirmation of the key service priorities to be tackled was required by the end of December 2005. A letter advising the Scottish Executive of Community Planning Partners intentions (as detailed at 5.2) was submitted by the due date.
- 7.2 Officers are now working on the preparation of the funding bid, including baseline material, outcomes and monitoring mechanisms which requires to be submitted to the Executive by 31 January 2006.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 None arising from this report.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Scottish Executive confirmed by Press Release on 6 January 2006, a funding allocation for 2006/07 to East Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership of £300,000 (i.e. £100,000 for each of the 3 RSPAs). It is anticipated that this will be a one off package of funding, therefore the majority of programmes securing finance will be capital programmes or will require to have a clear plan for future sustainability. The funding will be paid to the Council, on behalf of Community Planning Partners, as part of the Revenue Support Grant.

10. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The proposals contained within this report complement the overall objectives and priorities contained within the Community Plan.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 The Policy and Resources Committee is asked to:

- i) note the progress in relation to the RSPAs;
- ii) endorse the key service priorities as detailed at paragraph 5.2;
- iii) remit Officers to progress all related actions on behalf of the Council and Community Planning Partners; and
- iv) otherwise, note the content of the report.

Elizabeth Morton
Depute Chief Executive/ Executive Director of Corporate Support
20 January 2006

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Letters from the Scottish Executive dated 25 January 2005 and 8 April 2005. Consultation summary November 2005. Scottish Executive Press Release dated 6 January 2006. Copies available from Gwen Barker, Community Planning and Partnership Manager (Tel: 01563 554602).

Scottish Executive Website : <http://www.scotland.gov.uk>

Data Zones Map. Available in the Members' Information Point.

Any person wishing further information should contact John Clayton, Head of Corporate Development and Communication (Tel: 01563 576165) or Gwen Barker, Community Planning and Partnership Manager (Tel: 01563 554602)

IMPLEMENTATION OFFICER

John Clayton, Head of Corporate Development and Communication