

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 25 NOVEMBER 2004

AYRSHIRE ELECTRONIC COMMUNITY

Report by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Support

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Members that the temporarily funded Ayrshire Electronic Community (AEC) project reaches the end of its funding period on 31 December 2004 and to highlight proposals for an exit from the project and ongoing integration and sustainability of appropriate residual service provision within the Council's mainstream activities.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At its meeting on 4 October 2001, the Policy and Resources Committee approved a bid for external funding for a new or revised Ayrshire Electronic Community project to continue the 'ICT Inclusiveness' initiative beyond December 2001.
- 2.2 The AEC project received 'Year 1' European Match Funding of £1.76 million on 8 May 2002. The funding partners also included East Ayrshire Council (lead agency), East Ayrshire Coalfields Area SIP, North Ayrshire Council, North Ayrshire SIP, Ayrshire and Arran NHS Primary Care Trust, and Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire. Additional 'Year 2' European and Partner funding was subsequently secured for ongoing work programmes up to 31 December 2004.
- 2.3 The main objective of the project was to increase the use and uptake of ICT by individuals, communities and small businesses in the East and North Ayrshire SIP areas.
- 2.4 In line with European funding accountabilities, the project was recently subjected to an independent evaluation. The resultant consultant's report acknowledged that the project had met (and indeed had exceeded some) its targets associated with the European Funding Application and that its services and activities were well received in the SIP communities. The report also noted a continuing need in the wider community for ICT inclusiveness.

3. AEC STEERING GROUP

- 3.1 Members will be aware that an AEC Project Steering Group, chaired by the Council's Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Support was put in place to control and monitor the project's activities. All partner agencies are represented on the Group. At the Steering Group's meeting on 30 September 2004, it was noted that the AEC project had fulfilled, and in a significant number of respects,

exceeded its intended remit and would cease its activities on 31 December 2004, in line with the funding period. The Steering Group, thereafter, recognised the need for the partner agencies to now review the provision of services.

- 3.2 The Project Programme Manager has been tasked by the Steering Group to prepare a transition plan to ensure seamless transition of essential services from AEC to both East Ayrshire Council and North Ayrshire Council. Discussions are continuing with North Ayrshire colleagues to inform this process.
- 3.3 The Project Programme Manager is currently reminding and notifying relevant stakeholders that the funding period ends on 31 December 2004 and of the cessation of the AEC programme.

4. TRANSITION OF ESSENTIAL SERVICES

- 4.1 Officers are currently putting together plan options designed to meet the ongoing ICT inclusiveness need in the wider community. Initial indications show that the current level and access to ICT service provision throughout the Council area is significantly enhanced compared with the 1999 position when the project was introduced. Specifically, options are now being assessed for meeting the continuing need in the wider community for ICT inclusiveness by utilising existing Council mainstream activity through existing Learning Centres in Education Services and the People's Network in the Libraries Service, and linking with other similar projects such as BTTC. By so doing, the Council will secure improved value through the elimination of potential duplication within the Council's ICT inclusiveness service provision
- 4.2 The plans being put together to exit from the project and to integrate and mainstream appropriate residual AEC project services will consider, amongst other issues, the following matters:
 - in consultation with service departments, identification of the appropriate essential services to be transferred into mainstream Council activity;
 - the timescale and arrangements for the transfer
 - the identification of, and allocation of departmental budget provision to ensure a seamless transition and continued provision of essential services;
 - the quantification of any residual project under spend due to be returned to funding partners.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Any resultant mainstreamed activity requires to link to local priorities set out in the East Ayrshire Community Plan.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 It is anticipated that some of the initial costs of the exit transition would be met from the under spend accruing from the AEC revenue budget as at 31 December 2004. The Project Steering Group is addressing this matter.
- 6.2 Any costs associated with the continued provision of identified essential services would require to be met from departmental budget process.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 None directly.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 The Committee is asked to:
- i) note that the AEC project has fulfilled, and in a significant number of respects, exceeded its intended remit and would cease its activities on 31 December 2004, in line with the funding period;
 - ii) remit to the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Support, in consultation with service departments, to identify and take forward the transition of appropriate essential services from AEC to the Council; and
 - iii) otherwise note the content of the report.

Elizabeth Morton

Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Support, 17 November 2004

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

AEC Steering Group Minutes: 30 September 2004

Frontline Consultants Report: 2004

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