

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET – 21 NOVEMBER 2012

AYRSHIRE'S NEW COLLEGE CONSULTATION : EAST AYRSHIRE'S RESPONSE

Report by Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To seek approval for response to the consultation document "Ayrshire's New College" issued by the Chairs of the 3 Ayrshire Further Education Colleges in October 2012.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Further Education Colleges presently stand as independent from Local Government and are centrally administered nationally. As part of a national programme, the Scottish Government has been seeking to re-organise the Further Education (FE) College sector by the creation of a number of "regional Colleges." Like all other parts of Scotland therefore, the Colleges of this area have been engaged in a change programme which aims to create the new regional College structure for Ayrshire by 1 August 2013.
- 2.2 A consultation document has now been issued under covering letter of 25 October 2012 seeking views on the formation of the new regional College which will see a merger of Ayr College, Kilmarnock College and James Watt College (North Ayrshire Campus). This is quite clearly a highly significant development in the landscape of education in this area and which forms the background to this consultative response.

3. SUMMARY OF THE CHANGES

- 3.1 The creation of one single integrated College will have significant implications, not just for the staff and the management structures involved but also the way the sector is organised and how the School sector and Economic Development sections of the Council will link to the new organisation.
- 3.2 In summary, the changes are highlighted in page 4 of the College consultative document:
- *"The Scottish Government wants the College sector to re-organise and create a smaller number of larger regional Colleges.*
 - *Ayr, James Watt and Kilmarnock propose to create a single new College to cover the whole of Ayrshire from August 2013.*
 - *The three partners believe they can harness individual strengths and successes to create a stronger, more successful regional College.*
 - *The new College will take a strategic regional approach to the education, training and skills needs of Ayrshire – and the wider economic and social*

needs of Ayrshire. This region-wide approach will not diminish the delivery of education and training locally.

- *The new College will aim to be excellent and inclusive. It will offer high-quality courses at all levels, while ensuring those furthest from the labour market are given opportunities to enhance essential skills and increase their prospects of gaining employment.*
- *Excellent learning and teaching – delivered in modern, high-quality facilities – is a top priority for the new College. It will strive to deliver first-class experiences and positive destinations for all students.*
- *Ayrshire’s new College will offer a single point of contact to students, employers, partners and stakeholders, reducing confusion and duplication.*
- *One College for Ayrshire will be better-placed to deliver for business. It will offer a single gateway for employers and the combined strength of the partner Colleges will allow it to deliver a much broader and deeper range of training packages for business and industry.*
- *A single College will offer a broad, balanced curriculum, while seeking to develop areas of strengths such as engineering and hospitality.*
- *Ayrshire’s new College will be innovative and dynamic and its greater scale and reach will enable it to be more responsive to future skills demand.*
- *Articulation routes with a range of university partners will be enhanced under a single College.*
- *The new College will build strong partnerships and act as a focal point to drive economic growth and enhance social cohesion.*
- *The new College is not driven by desire to save money, but it will use public funding more effectively and efficiently – and as a way to leverage private investment.*
- *The new College will increase opportunities and raise aspirations for individuals, families and communities across Ayrshire.”*

3.3 The document also emphasises that the new College will work through a statutory framework as an integral part of community planning partnerships. This is to be welcomed since it is unlikely that the Council on its own would be able to deliver its key strategic objectives without full harmonisation with the Colleges which provide a bridge from the formal education sector to skills, training and employment. The consultative document quite rightly highlights the problems faced with youth unemployment in both East Ayrshire and North Ayrshire and recognises the new College role in addressing this significant issue. This is a shared aim with the Council – directly linked to East Ayrshire’s stated strategic priorities. Complete integrated working within the contents of community planning partnerships will be central to addressing this central challenge that faces this area.

3.4 East Ayrshire Council and the local Colleges, particularly Ayr College and Kilmarnock College, have a long tradition of close working relationships. This has become particularly strong over the last few years and is seen not only in the context of an integrated educational landscape, but in the contribution that Colleges can make both to employability and to economic regeneration. There can therefore be a high level of confidence that the history of

development in the local further education sector will be continued into the future to develop the aims set out in paragraph 3.2 above.

4. RESPONSE TO THE PROPOSAL

4.1 For these reasons, the formation of the new regional College for Ayrshire is to be welcomed and supported. It will give a regional dimension to economic development and employability. Amalgamation will assist Ayrshire in competing on an equal footing with some of the city regions of Scotland. The advantages of the new College structure as described in the consultative document appears to have strength in terms of the experience of the creation of a larger, stronger, more strategic unit. It is therefore proposed that the Council should welcome the creation of the new Ayrshire Regional College.

4.2 The commitment to work within community planning partnerships with the local authorities and other agencies is also welcomed. However, it is also proposed to include in the submission as part of the consultative response the normal organisational safeguards, seeking reassurance on the commitment to harmonise provision with the local authorities as being vital and requiring to be maintained into the future.

5. COMMUNITY PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The new College structure will be harmonised by statute to the present community planning partnership arrangements. In practice, this will reflect what is already the accepted situation here in East Ayrshire.

6. HUMAN RESOURCES / FINANCIAL / POLICY / LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Nil

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 It is recommended that Members agree to:

- (i) that officers respond to the consultation welcoming the formation of a new Ayrshire College as described in the consultative document;
- (ii) seek reassurance that the new College will work in the existing spirit of partnership with the three local authorities; and
- (iii) otherwise note the contents of this report.

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Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

GS/JP
5 November 2012

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Ayrshire's New College Consultation Document – October 2012

Any person wishing further information on this report should contact Graham Short, Executive Director of Educational and Social Services; Tel 01563 576017.

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