



Future East Ayrshire Live transcript: part 1

(3:25) As part of the new curriculum for Excellence, there are many new courses available – but how are schools able to find money to buy books and train staff when faced with budget constraints?

Graham Short: I am proud to tell you that in terms of the implementation for the new Curriculum for Excellence, East Ayrshire Council is leading the country. Our teachers have embraced these changes right from the start and they have been preparing for this for several years. Unlike other parts of the country, this has not proven to be difficult.

In terms of resources, the majority of the education budget is delegated to our Headteachers to manage and they do this extremely effectively and creatively. By allowing them to do so we have not encountered any problems with resources allocated to the implementation of the new curriculum for excellence. The Scottish Government has also released additional funding for this and we will apply these resources to ensure that we continue to deliver a quality learning experience for our young people and to support our teachers in the classroom.

(6:00) What is going to happen to the old Kilmarnock Academy building – it's such an important local landmark in the town?

Graham Short: At Cabinet last Wednesday the council agreed to the future merger of James Hamilton Academy with Kilmarnock Academy. We know the people do recognise the importance of preserving this iconic red sandstone building in the town. A specialist group of elected members and senior council officers will be established to consider the future of the building.

(7:40) What measures were put in place by East Ayrshire Council to protect services before handing them over to the Leisure Trust?

Fiona Lees: We took the decision to protect our leisure facilities as we realise how much they are valued by local people in East Ayrshire. The council has invested significantly in these facilities, including the



Dick Institute, Dean Castle and Country Park and Ayrshire Athletics Arena. The best way to protect these services was to transfer them to a charitable trust, which can apply for funding which is not available to the council and which can access charitable benefits – for example don't pay rates.

The council's assets have been leased to the Trust and the Council will give a grant to the trust to enable them to deliver these services.

Alex McPhee: A lot of ground work took place prior to this happening. Officers from Legal, Finance and Property met and a series of legal agreements were put in place to ensure that everything was done properly and to ensure that everything was protected from the outset. The Trust cannot close any facilities. Any decisions regarding closures will be made by East Ayrshire Cabinet. This will be a business decision, based on the usage and the cost of running the properties.

(11:00) Would I be correct in saying that Newmilns Ski Slope is a successful example of communities getting involved?

Fiona Lees: yes Newmilns Ski slope is an outstanding success and an excellent example of communities taking on the local facilities. We want to encourage more communities to follow this example and we will support them to be all they can be.

(12:00) We are placing an interest in the sports pavilion in Mauchline and possibly one for the playing fields. We would like to know what would happen if these were no longer feasible? Would it be possible to hand these facilities back to the Trust or the Council if it didn't work out?

Fiona Lees: We want to do everything we possibly can to support our communities wanting to take on the running of facilities and we have developed a Community Asset Transfer policy to assist with this process.

Alex McPhee: We have a professional team in place to provide every sort of support required from property and legal advice to finance and technical support as well and assistance with business planning. We want to make sure communities are confident in their abilities to deliver this from the outset.



(14:55) What will happen if communities don't take on facilities?

Fiona Lees: We are only too aware of the problems caused by empty properties in our area. But we don't want to leave out communities with problems. If there is a recommendation to close a building, we will put it on the market. If there is still no interest, we may have to consider demolition as we cannot spend unlimited funds on security for empty buildings. Each case will be considered on its own merits – and we will consider all the options when determining the future of these buildings.

There is asbestos in one of the buildings we have expressed an interest in. Will the council do something about this or will there be grants available to help us finance the removal of the asbestos?

Alex McPhee: We will not hand over any white elephants. There are funds available to carry out essential works prior to handing over a property.

(16:30) There are discussions taking place regarding library closures. If these closures take place, are there strategies in place to enable the public to have access to books, computer and mobile libraries?

Elizabeth Morton: We understand the value being placed on our library provision. And we are considering a range of alternative options should we not be able to keep the number of libraries we currently have. We are exploring new ways of accessing books including e-readers and mobile library provision – and we are looking to change the way people access library provision in the future.

(18: 45) If families have to travel from the Valley to access library facilities in the hub town, they will face a surcharge. Will you at least consider 2 days library provision each in Darvel and Newmilns? This is an unacceptable cost for families to bear in order to access libraries.

Elizabeth Morton: We welcome these suggestions which reflect the true feelings within our communities, we will look at different options to continue service provision – and this will also include looking at library provision within our schools, as well as increasing the mobile provision.



Graham Short: We have been looking to develop community use of our school facilities and not just libraries, but access to books. Quality literature is something that this council will seek to preserve.

(23:15) Are there any plans to rationalise secondary education in the Cumnock / Auchinleck area?

Graham Short: We did a consultation event in the Cumnock area a few months ago and this very issue was raised by the community itself. We are looking at every school in East Ayrshire in terms of capacity and facilities, and looking at the space available within them and many schools have a lot of free space. While there are no direct plans currently for Secondary schools in Cumnock and Auchinleck, we will be looking at all school estates accommodation across East Ayrshire.

(25:15) What plans are there for the grounds of the former St John's Primary in Cumnock?

Graham Short: This is a large building which housed 230 pupils; there is also a full size football pitch and a community wing. The community wing is subject to an expression of interest through Community Asset Transfer. The premises have been secured for the time being, but we will be reviewing primary school provision in general in the Cumnock area. We know that Greenmill primary requires a lot of work, so while there are no direct plans for St John's building property at this moment in time, it will be considered as part of an overall review of school provision in Cumnock.

(27:10) What is the council doing about broadband in rural areas?

Fiona Lees: on top of the investment from Scottish Government, East Ayrshire Council has committed £1.2 million to provide further development of broadband access across the area. Over the next 2 years we are hopeful that 95% of our population will have access to high speed broadband. BT is currently undertaking local surveys and we await more details in due course. A full report will be submitted to cabinet early 2014.