

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET – 2 NOVEMBER 2016

TOURISM ACTION PLAN FOR EAST AYRSHIRE

Report by the Depute Chief Executive and Chief Financial Officer **Economy and Skills**

PURPOSE

1. The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet approval of a final draft action plan for the period 2017 – 2020 to support the development of tourism within East Ayrshire.

BACKGROUND

2. East Ayrshire has an exciting tourism product comprising of history and heritage, cultural venues and visitor attractions, and natural environment providing opportunities for a range of outdoor activities and recreation. Tourism makes a significant contribution to the East Ayrshire economy in terms of both revenue of £68m into the economy last year and 1,900 local jobs. Recognising this, Cabinet approved a draft action plan in June 2016 for consultation with the industry and public sector partners.
3. The context for this action plan remains the Ayrshire and Arran Tourism Strategy 2012-2017 and is flexible enough to take account of an update scheduled for 2018-2020 as well as taking account of the ambitions set out in the national strategy for Scotland's visitor economy.
4. At a regional level, there are clear objectives relating to number of visitors; annual spend by visitors and employment levels supported by the sector and this action plan sets out East Ayrshire's commitment to contribute to these. The following targets over the life time of the plan will be reported and monitored through the Council's Electronic Performance Management System and the Community Plan Partnership's Economy and Skills Action Plan:
 - Increasing the annual number of visitors coming to East Ayrshire by 10%, from 1.054 million to 1.15 million by 2020.
 - Increasing annual spend by visitors by 20% from £ 64 million to £76 million by 2020.
 - Increasing employment supported by the sector by 10% from 1,634 jobs to 1,797 jobs by 2020.

PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

5. The key principle of this action plan is to create and develop links with and between public sector economic regeneration agencies, tourism businesses in the private sector and attractions and facilities operated by the public sector

and communities within East Ayrshire to work together towards a shared vision for tourism. Proposed activities are set within a strategic action framework which highlights:

- (1) the importance of turning our assets into experiences – culture and heritage; nature and outdoor activities; events and festivals and community tourism.
- (2) improving the customer journey – food and drink; visitor information provision; accommodation; digital infrastructure; accessible tourism; and signage.
- (3) building our capabilities – tourism is everyone’s business; leadership and collaboration- sustainability; marketing; jobs and skills; and
- (4) data collection, monitoring and quality assurance.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

6. This action plan has been the subject of a web-based consultation process promoted via email, social media and local newspapers and has included direct invitation to more than 200 businesses to provide input.
7. The responses from both partner organisations and the business community, albeit small in number, have been largely positive. The small number of responses, some 37 in total, may simply reflect the fact that our consultation coincided with peak season for tourism businesses or it may be symptomatic of a lack of direct engagement by previous structures. A programme of engagement and networking will be required to strengthen our links to the wider industry.
8. As appropriate, cognisance has been taken of suggested changes and amendments and these have been included in the final draft. These have largely focused on the following:
 - the need to prioritise activities and to have a greater focus on a more limited number of actions;
 - the opportunity to build on what is special in East Ayrshire, rather than trying to build upon the golf and watersports focus on other parts of Ayrshire;
 - more visible joint working with VisitScotland to provide support to tourism businesses and to promote East Ayrshire’s assets; and
 - a greater focus on support for sector skills training and the need to work with colleagues in Education to promote career opportunities in tourism and hospitality.

CURRENT ACTIVITIES

9. Underpinning this consultation process has been the establishment of a tourism advisory group comprising key industry leaders in East Ayrshire together with public sector partners to oversee progress in terms of developing the tourism

sector and to provide support and guidance in relation to project development and implementation.

10. Members of the group are VisitScotland, Ayrshire College, Scottish Enterprise, the Park Hotel, East Ayrshire Leisure, Ayrshire Bed and Breakfast Association, Crawfordland Estate, Dumfries House and East Ayrshire Council. It is anticipated that membership of the group will be supplemented by timebound input from particular interest groups and agencies with regard to specific actions and projects.
11. The group has met once, has agreed its terms of reference and meeting schedule and has input into this action plan.
12. Across the themes of the action plan, the Council's Tourism Development Officer is addressing issues of customer service by promoting participation in the Ayrshire Smiles scheme. A focus on digital marketing has is being promoted by working with VisitScotland and Business Gateway to deliver workshops and training specifically targeted at tourism and food and drink businesses. Marketing has focused on promoting East Ayrshire's tourism product at key events both locally and regionally and we have been working with VisitScotland to devise new marketing campaigns focused on our outdoor activities.

NEXT STEPS

13. The agreed action plan will be formally launched later this year. The Tourism Development Officer will continue to work with partners to ensure delivery of the plan and the Tourism Advisory Group will meet and provide support and input as appropriate.
14. Activities captured within the action plan will be monitored and updates will be provided to Cabinet on an annual basis. Data from ad hoc visitor and business surveys will be fed into this monitoring process and the action plan will be reviewed in advance of April 2018.

HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15. There are no other Human Resource implications arising from this proposal.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

16. There are no financial implications arising from this proposal and any future proposals regarding resource will be contained within the existing tourism and promotion budgets.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

17. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

18. An Equality Impact Assessment is currently being completed and will be published on the Council's website in due course.

RISK ASSESSMENT

19. There are a number of risks associated with this action plan particularly in terms of ability to engage with industry partners and to deliver against high level objectives as set out at paragraph 4. The creation of a local industry group seeks to mitigate against these risks by creating a mechanism for sharing information, for robust challenge and performance monitoring.

RECOMMENDATIONS

20. Cabinet is asked to
 - 1) Approve the tourism action plan appended to this report for delivery in 2017-2020;
 - 2) Remit to the Depute Chief Executive to implement the proposals set out within this paper; and
 - 3) Otherwise note the content of this report and the associated action plan.

Alex McPhee

**Depute Chief Executive and Chief Financial Officer
Economy and Skills**

27 October 2016

Any party wishing further information should contact Sharon Hodgson, Economic Development Manager on 01563 554591.

Implementation Officer – Michael Keane, Head of Planning & Economic Development

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Report to East Ayrshire Cabinet, 8 June 2016 – DRAFT TOURISM ACTION PLAN FOR EAST AYRSHIRE

Report to East Ayrshire Cabinet, 13 January 2016 - FUTURE DELIVERY OF THE AYRSHIRE AND ARRAN TOURISM STRATEGY IN EAST AYRSHIRE