



## Spotlight on community empowerment as Cabinet Secretary visits Kilmarnock.

With community empowerment remaining firmly at the top of the agenda, East Ayrshire Council was delighted to welcome Aileen Campbell MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government to Kilmarnock earlier this week, to demonstrate how these new ways of working are helping to transform local communities.

During the visit, which was hosted by Centrestage, the Cabinet Secretary met with Council Leader, Councillor Douglas Reid, Depute Leader, Councillor Elena Whitham, Chief Executive Fiona Lees, Depute Chief Executive, Katie Kelly and Willie Coffey MSP, to learn more about the Council's approach which is driving transformation within local communities.

Initiatives like Community Asset Transfers and Community Led Action Plans play a key role in the process, with Vibrant Communities working closely with local communities providing valuable support and encouragement along the way.

The Cabinet Secretary also had the opportunity to see some of the Centrestage's most successful initiatives in practice including Connect, which supports young people disengaged with school, providing digital, creative and performing arts activities that harness their strengths and develop new skills; and Catalyst, which works with individuals pre and post liberation to enable a



supportive process back into their communities, with workshops, advice and arts-based activities that create a platform for new opportunities

Centrestage, one of 50 Community Asset Transfers in East Ayrshire, is the cornerstone for the Kilmarnock Academy Legacy Project, which will see the creation of a community hub, incorporating sporting, educational, community and creative spaces in the iconic Kilmarnock Academy building. When complete, this will be the biggest Community Asset Transfer in Scotland. Funding of £2m, received from the Scottish Government's Regeneration Capital Grant Fund, will contribute to the development of this Project.

Leader of East Ayrshire Council, Councillor Douglas Reid said: "It was a pleasure to welcome the Cabinet Secretary to Kilmarnock today, to demonstrate how the Council's approach to community regeneration is helping to transform the lives of local people.

"It's encouraging to see community empowerment happening across East Ayrshire. We are supporting more and more communities to put their own plans in place and the Scottish Government's Review of Local Governance will open more opportunities for us to take this work to the next level.

"Our Community Asset Transfer scheme has enabled Centrestage to move to the Kilmarnock Academy site, which will enhance our Cultural Quarter with its proximity to the Dick Institute and Palace Theatre Complex.

"Centrestage has a proven track record of working with communities and individuals to nurture and promote social enterprise and entrepreneurship. This move will allow them to create 25 new jobs and upwards of 25 new voluntary positions as well as contributing to town centre regeneration, and our local economy as a whole."

The Cabinet Secretary also learned more about the Centrestage Dignified Food Provision model, which seeks to eradicate food insecurity and reliance on food banks whilst teaching new cookery skills to communities. This initiative has seen significant growth across Ayrshire, redistributing surplus food from partners, creating delicious meals that are delivered through their 'On the Road' and "Eat And Train on the Road" programme.

She said: "I was pleased to hear how the strong partnership working between the Scottish Government and East Ayrshire Council on the Social Innovation Partnership has supported Centrestage to take ownership of the Kilmarnock Academy for the benefit of the community.

"I was delighted to see first-hand how their hard work and innovative approach is helping to tackle poverty and inequalities and improve the lives of local people.

"This iconic building, which is being redeveloped with a support from our Regeneration Capital Grant Fund, will not only provide a new home for the organisation, but crucially it will allow them to continue to expand the support and enhance the opportunities they provide for Kilmarnock and its neighbouring communities."

CEO at Centrestage Fiona McKenzie said: "It was wonderful to welcome Aileen Campbell MSP to Kilmarnock Academy today and share our vision and ideas for this incredible site.



"It was also significant for our participants from across our activities to share their stories on how Connect, Catalyst and Dignified Food Provision continues to support them with thanks to the vital and continued backing from the Scottish Government."

Following the visit, Aileen Campbell MSP tweeted:

"What an inspiring visit to see the guys at @CentrestageMT – projects and people delivering great things for @EastAyrshire communities. The energy was palpable and so too was the passion from all involved."

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