

## **North Ayrshire Council Response to Local Healthcare Bill**

### **I. Introduction**

The Council welcomes the opportunity to consider the proposals contained in the consultation document regarding direct elections to NHS Boards. All Council members have been asked to consider the proposals and the questions contained in the document and have been invited to respond directly to the Scottish Government with their views.

### **2. Public and Patient Involvement**

The Council agrees in principle that there is merit in seeking to improve public involvement and influence on NHS Boards.

It is aware of the previous private members bill "The Health Board Elections (Scotland) Bill" introduced in March 2006 which was subsequently voted down and of COSLA's opposition to that bill. This was on the basis that, at that time, COSLA considered the case had not been made for its introduction.

The involvement of elected members on NHS Boards since then has assisted in improving democratic accountability and the scrutiny of Board proposals. There may be further opportunities to develop this accountability with local authorities in conjunction with the evolving role of Community Health Partnerships and of Community Planning Partnerships.

The development of local Public Partnership Forums has been a useful means of engaging more effectively with the public and with patients to gain a better understanding of how services can be improved and developed to meet local needs. The Council also seeks to engage effectively with the public in a range of different ways to ensure that we are aware of their views on our services and how they are delivered. It is important that the views of all of our communities are heard and that hard to reach and disadvantaged communities are engaged in this process.

In relation to the scrutiny of Board proposals, the Council has supported the establishment of an expert panel as the most effective way of providing independent scrutiny in its response to the recent consultation on independent scrutiny of NHS Boards.

Local authorities are subject to a range of inspections and formal scrutiny of their performance by various bodies, such as Audit Scotland. They are accountable for their activities in this way, unlike the NHS which is solely accountable to the Scottish Government. There may be merit in introducing some form of similar independent scrutiny for NHS Boards.

### **3. Conclusion**

The Council is not commenting on the principle of direct elections to NHS Boards, or the governance and resources issues associated with these proposals. It supports the principle of greater public and patient involvement in the planning and delivery of health care services and would suggest that this could be assisted by some form of independent scrutiny, similar to the audit and inspection of local government.

March 2008