East Ayrshire Council welcomes the opportunity to consider how the UK’s immigration policy can best respond to Scotland’s demographic and skills needs. Within East Ayrshire there is a limited migrant population and none of our local businesses report any dependency on migrant labour to fulfil their operational activities. On the face of it therefore any variation to the UK policy may be less important in East Ayrshire than it would be for other areas of Scotland.

However, East Ayrshire and its neighbouring authorities are working on the development and delivery of major investment projects which we believe will transform the Ayrshire economy and contribute to Scottish growth and in this scenario we anticipate that future demographic and labour needs will shift significantly. The region is projected to lose population and this combined with an aging population could impact on our plans and their success and we believe that an immigration policy which can address these challenges will be essential.

The options set out in Dr Hepburn’s report certainly provide a broad range of options and the associated case studies clearly set out the benefits of each. Our view is that it is unlikely there is one solution to the challenges Scotland is seeking to address and we would like to understand more about how solutions can combine and be aligned to varying labour market needs across the country for maximum positive impact.

While we do not have a strong sense of what would work best we do have concerns about enforcement and the costs associated with trying to implement a different system to other parts of the UK.

Most importantly, consultation with our business base reveals a variety of views in relation to Brexit and much of the concern our businesses express relates to the uncertainty created by Brexit and the inability to plan for the unknown. In this context we would support an early conclusion to this work so that the Scottish Government can reach a positive solution and provide the support our business base needs to thrive and succeed.