North Ayrshire Demographics

North Ayrshire is an area of contrasts. The main towns of Irvine, Kilwinning, Ardrossan, Saltcoats and Stevenston suffer from relatively high level of deprivation. Dalry, Beith and Kilbirnie in the Garnock Valley also suffer from the effects of the decline in manufacturing industries. On the other hand the area also includes affluent coastal towns and villages such as Largs and Skelmorlie as well as the islands of Arran and Cumbrae which have relatively high elderly populations.

Historically North Ayrshire’s population has not increased as fast as Scotland. Indeed over the last couple of decades the population has remained virtually static at around 137,000. However the latest National Records of Scotland population projections show that over the next 25 years North Ayrshire’s population will fall from 136,480 in 2014 to 126,295 in 2039 (-7.5% compared to an increase of 6.6% for Scotland). At the same time North Ayrshire’s elderly population is projected to increase from 22.8% of total population to 30.0%.

The main cause of this projected population decline is natural change ie more deaths than births. In terms of the migration component of population change North Ayrshire is projected to have a small positive net migration. Clearly the issue of immigration is critical to the Council’s aim of reversing the projected population fall.

Policy Options

Depending on the terms negotiated between the UK and the EU, the Scottish economy may be impacted negatively by future immigration rules for EU nationals. Evidence from local businesses shows skills shortages are already an issue, compounded by an out migration of working age population.

Population projections for North Ayrshire indicate that our population is aging more rapidly than elsewhere in Scotland, at the same time as our total population (including our working age population) is decreasing.

The Council is supportive of any options that will allow Scotland to continue to benefit from immigration as a means of ensuring that the recent relatively moderate population growth (compared to England) continues.

However the Council would also welcome policy initiatives that would benefit areas within Scotland (particularly those in the West of Scotland/Central Belt) that are vulnerable to population decline. In addition particular consideration should be given to ensuring that locally important sectors such as health and social care and tourism are able to attract sufficient workers into those labour markets at a time when local government faces a number of demand led cost pressures as a result of demographic change.

We also experience net-migration of our young people, many of whom leave the area to study. It will be extremely important for an area such as ours to have flexible immigration policies to plug skills shortages.