

**REPORT TO EDUCATION, LEARNING & LEISURE COMMITTEE –
29 OCTOBER 2009**

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: ECO SCHOOLS

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform elected members of the success of the Eco Schools programme across Aberdeenshire schools and the positive impact this is having in progressing the actions of the Council's Sustainability Charter.
- 1.2 To outline how the Education, Learning & Leisure Service proposes to recognise and celebrate the success of schools when they achieve an Eco Schools Green Flag award and to seek approval from the Committee on this proposal.

2. Background

- 2.1 Aberdeenshire Council is committed to ensuring that our actions are sustainable and meet our needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Aberdeenshire's Sustainability Charter 2008-2012).
- 2.2 There is a need to ensure that EL&L accords with the actions of the Sustainability Charter and meets the Council's wider targets by progressing work on sustainability by reducing consumption and dependence on finite resources and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- 2.3 In order to ensure that the wide range of EL&L sustainable development activities contribute to the Council's wider targets within the Sustainability Charter, a Sustainable Development Focus Group (SDFG) was established in 2007. The group is actively involved in raising awareness of the Council's Sustainability Charter and recognises that sharing good practice and information on sustainable developments are key factors to improving performance.
- 2.4 One of the most successful approaches to raising the awareness of children and young people of the need to reduce our carbon footprint and care for our environment has been the Eco Schools programme.
- 2.5 The need to involve children and young people in finding solutions to environmental and sustainable development challenges at a local level was identified at the United Nations Conference on Environment & Development (Rio Earth Summit) in 1992. As a result the Eco Schools programme was developed in 1994 by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) and introduced into the UK, including Scotland, in 1995.

2.6 The aim of the Eco Schools programme is to make environmental awareness and action an intrinsic part of the life and ethos of the school for both pupils and staff and to engage with the wider community.

2.7 Eco Schools – Awards System

2.7.1 To gain the status of an Eco School, schools are set a challenging agenda and have to demonstrate, through whole school collaborative working that they have successfully carried out the following:

- Improved the school's environment
- Reduced litter and waste
- Reduced energy and water use
- Devised efficient ways of travelling to and from school
- Promoted healthy lifestyles
- Encouraged active citizenship
- Built strong partnerships with a variety of community groups
- Developed international and global links

2.7.2 The first steps towards becoming an Eco School are for schools to begin to implement the **7 elements** of the programme:

- Establish an Eco Committee
- Carry out an environmental review
- Develop an action plan from the review findings
- Monitor and evaluate their progress
- Make links to the curriculum
- Involve the wider community
- Develop an Eco Code

2.7.3 In addition schools must carry out a **new topic** for each award level, by choosing from one of eight topics:

- Litter (compulsory)
- Waste
- Energy
- Travel
- School Grounds
- Biodiversity
- Health & Well-being
- Sustaining our World

2.7.4 The bronze award is the first in a series of 6 awards within the Eco Schools programme. Both bronze and silver awards are self-assessed by the school. Schools are encouraged to work through each level but can, if they wish, start the programme at a higher level, such as silver or even first Green Flag level.

Following a successful written Green Flag application the Eco Schools' assessor visits the school to examine the work carried out by the pupils and discusses the programme with the Eco Committee and other pupils.

Following a successful assessment a number of recommendations are made which the school must implement before each new flag is applied for. Application for each successive flag must take place within a two year time frame. If schools fail to apply within this time they are at risk of losing their existing flag.

Schools are expected to have maintained the previous work, implemented the recommendations and expanded the programme at each level before being awarded the second, third and fourth flags. The fourth Green Flag is the final award and gives the school the prestigious permanent Eco School status. It is expected to take approximately 8 years to achieve permanent status.

- 2.8 The Eco Schools programme was adopted in late 2001 by the Scottish Executive as a performance measure for one of their national priorities in education;

National Priority 4, Values and Citizenship.

Scottish ministers are keen to see a continued growth in the number of Green Flag awarded schools; particularly in the secondary school sector. As part of the School Improvement Framework, Education Authorities have been asked to report on

the number/percentage of primary and secondary schools within their area that are participating in the Eco-Schools Award or similar accredited environmental award.

Local indicator 4.1.7. The number of schools attaining Bronze, Silver and Green awards for Eco Schools by 2011 is set at:

- Bronze award - 100%
- Silver award - 70%
- Green Flag - 33%

- 2.9 Sustainable development activities continue to flourish and capture the enthusiasm and imagination of our children and young people and the Service is confident that we will meet the national targets by 2011.
- 2.10 Aberdeenshire schools working towards an Eco Schools award are fortunate in being able to call on the support and advice from lead officers from across the Council. These officers, due to their depth of knowledge and expertise, greatly enhance and extend the work of the schools on sustainability.

Sustainable Development Cross Service Contacts – Aberdeenshire Council

Sustainability Co-ordinators
Internal Waste Officer
Waste Promotions Officer
Principal Energy Management Engineer
School Travel Planning Officer
Renewable Energy Champion
Procurement Officer

- 2.11 At all award levels Aberdeenshire schools are showing rapid progress in moving towards Green Flag status.

Aberdeenshire Eco Schools - Progress

Position	2007	2009
Schools registered	162	173 (All)
Bronze Awards	72	111
Silver Awards	42	83
1 st Green Flag	9	26
2 nd Green Flag	2	9
3 rd Green Flag	0	1
4 th Green Flag	0	0

3. Success Stories and Activities

- 3.1 For secondary schools to acquire Eco Schools award status is far more challenging than it is for primary schools. In Aberdeenshire we now have all secondary schools registered as an Eco School and a number of secondary schools have been particularly successful in promoting sustainable development.

3.2 Mearns Academy

Mearns Academy achieved their Silver Eco Schools Award in May 2008. They are currently in the process of applying for their first Green Flag. Earlier this year the school attended an Eco Schools day for secondary schools held at the University of Aberdeen and took up the offer of a follow up visit from Eco Schools staff last month. Eco schools were so impressed at the extent of the environmental work and social responsibility at the school that they urged the school to apply for the Green Flag immediately. Eco schools commented that of particular note is the level of improvements to the school grounds where pupils have developed a garden, vegetable plot, raised beds and composting facilities. Flower beds and seating have improved the aesthetic quality at the school making it a more welcoming place for pupils, staff, parents and visitors. A strong sense of pride was demonstrated by the pupils and no litter was observed. This pride extends to the wider community and pupils recently landscaped an area of land at Laurencekirk Station. They are also developing Eco School links with a local nursery to develop an outdoor learning area.

3.3 Ellon Academy and Meldrum Academy

Ellon Academy along with Meldrum Academy have gained Eco Schools Green Flag status which is a tremendous achievement and a strong indication of their commitment to supporting the Council's Sustainable Charter.

3.4 Mackie Academy and Meldrum Academy

Two Aberdeenshire secondary schools, Meldrum and Mackie, have been successful in securing a place at the Eco Schools Conference 2009 at the Scottish Parliament on 5 October. Places were only available for 30 schools

at this conference. Four pupils and a member of teaching staff will attend from each school.

The day titled ‘Green Flag Experience – DIY’ will be pupil led, and the morning session involves a chance for the pupils to meet with experts and take part in a group discussion in the Debating Chamber, while in the afternoon there are interactive activities on the theme of a sustainable lifestyle.

3.5 GLOW

In September 2009 the Sustainable Development Officer (SDO) created two new GLOW groups to meet the needs of all sectors of the Service. There are now four groups, Sustainable Development for Early Years, Primary, Secondary and Staff.

This enables appropriate information and resources to be delivered at the relevant level.

3.6 The SDO is working with Learning and Teaching Scotland to develop Sustainable Development Curriculum links through GLOW.

The SDO has also been invited to join the Learning & Teaching Scotland, Curriculum for Excellence exemplification working group for Developing Global Citizens.

This is a short term working group with the strategic and operational priority for Developing Global Citizens (DGC) by embedding its principles in Curriculum for Excellence. The exemplification will cover a range of DGC themes including International Education; Sustainable Development Education; Education for Citizenship; Confucius Classrooms; and Homecoming.

3.7 Old Rayne Primary School

In September this year Old Rayne School became the first school in Aberdeenshire to achieve their 3rd Eco Schools Green Flag. This achievement is the result of six years hard work since registering for the programme in 2003.

Eco Schools assessors were particularly impressed with the Bonnyton Community garden developed on land near to the school. This year the school has worked with a local community group and parents to prepare the land and plant vegetables, fruit bushes and an apple tree. The school had a successful harvest in September and sold all their vegetable boxes to the community. The pupils also run a community café every Friday afternoon. This came about when the Pupil Council became concerned that their parents did not have the same opportunities to meet and mix with the rest of the village as the pupils. The café is run by the pupils during term time and provides a place to meet others and enjoy tea, coffee and home baking and it has proved to be very popular. Produce from the garden is proudly displayed and can be purchased at the café. As well as the café, the pupils also run a

Fairtrade stall and profits from both the stall, café and garden are used to purchase school equipment for their sister school in Malawi. Last year they raised £600 which paid for new amenities at the school. The school and community group are currently in the process of applying to the Climate Challenge Fund to further develop their garden project.

Tyrie School

Tyrie signed up to the Eco Schools Programme in 2006 and have made exceptional progress in a very short time. The school felt that they had already embraced the Eco Schools concept and by-passed the Bronze and Silver awards to successfully achieve their 1st Green Flag in 2007. Less than two years later, in May 2009 the school were awarded their 2nd Green Flag. Pupils impressed the Eco Schools assessors with their monitoring and evaluation work such as the careful auditing of litter and waste. They also carried out a comprehensive food miles study and sourced produce from their garden and local community to produce a gourmet menu in which their food miles were negligible. The menu was so impressive that the school won first place in the UK Kenwood Food Miles competition as part of the British Food Fortnight. The school have also created a wildlife garden and were awarded a Green Butterfly Award by Aberdeenshire Environmental Forum in 2008.

4. Proposal

- 4.1 At present when a school has achieved an Eco Schools award at any one level it is entitled to apply for a one-off Scottish Government grant of £250. The majority of schools seek to secure this funding at bronze level so that the monies can then help towards funding their activities towards the next award level.
- 4.2 In order to recognise the success of schools moving up the ladder to reach 4th Green Flag, it is proposed that funding be sought from one of Aberdeenshire Council's business partnerships. This would provide an incentive for schools to aim for Green Flag status.

An award system along the following lines is proposed:

- 1st Green Flag - £100
- 2nd Green Flag - £200
- 3rd Green Flag - £300
- 4th Green Flag - £400

If we were to recognise schools currently in this manner the total annual cost would be minimal and approximately £5,000 (based on the projected figures averaged over a 3 year period). The SDFG is therefore confident that we will acquire sponsorship for this proposal.

- 4.3 In addition to this prize there would be an event at the school 'to raise the flag' when local elected members, sponsor representatives, SDFG members, officers and parents would be invited to join the children in celebrating their success and viewing the various improvements they had made towards sustainability.

There would also be a report with photographs/video footage on GLOW, profile of the school on Aberdeenshire's corporate website and a report in SQ. Schools would also prepare a press statement with photographs for the local press. The 'Waste Aware Bus' would be on site at the school all day.

- 4.4 The SDO would play a key role in ensuring all schools were given this opportunity to celebrate their success in gaining Green Flag status.

5. Discussion

- 5.1 There has been a rapid increase in the number of Aberdeenshire schools gaining Eco Schools awards over the last two years. The SDFG wishes to ensure that all schools achieve the bronze award by 2011 and to support and encourage all schools to aim for Green Flag status.
- 5.2 At present there is no set procedure for the Service to follow in celebrating a school's Eco Schools achievement. Members of the SDFG feel strongly that schools should be rewarded for their efforts and a means of celebrating their success developed as standard practice across the authority.

6. Area Implications

- 6.1 It is the intention that this report will influence and promote sustainability across the EL&L Service and in all areas of Aberdeenshire Council.
- 6.2 There is the expectation that all staff, Officers and Elected members will continue to support and promote sustainability in Aberdeenshire.

7. Staffing Implications

- 7.1 A full time seconded post of Sustainable Development Officer was initially put in place for one year, but this post has now been extended until the end of March 2010. The post is funded by the EL&L Service.

8. Policy Implications

- 8.1 The impacts of climate change and scale of carbon emissions are factors to be considered in the formation of all Council policy and decision making.

9. Financial Implications

- 9.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report. It is the intention to seek sponsorship for the Green Flag celebratory event. The Service is confident that sponsorship will be acquired for the Eco Schools award programme.

10. Sustainability Implications

- 10.1 This report accords with the aspirations and actions contained within the Council's Sustainability Charter and meets the Council's aims to progress work on sustainability, reducing consumption and dependence on finite resources, reducing fossil fuel dependency and adapting to climate change.

11. Consultation

- 11.1 The Section 95 Finance Officer and the Monitoring Officer with Corporate Services, and Head of Human Resources & Organisational Development, have been consulted and have no adverse comments.

12. Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:-

- 12.1 note the progress and impact to date, in relation to the Eco Schools' awards programme across Aberdeenshire schools;**
- 12.2 approve the proposed procedure for the Service to follow when celebrating Eco Schools Green Flag awards;**
- 12.3 agree to receive further reports on the progress of the Eco Schools programme and the impact this is having on meeting the Council's targets on sustainability.**

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