

Report

Date of Meeting: ~~18th November 2008~~

Title	Support Biodiversity in Schools Officer
Purpose	To seek the views of Forum Members re: agreement on match funding the post.
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Schools	ALL

Summary

This proposal is for the creation of a new full time (3 year fixed term) post to effectively be a single point of contact for schools to enable them to:

- 1 make best use of their grounds to assist in the delivery of the environmental aspects of the curriculum, in conjunction with the work of the Curriculum Improvement Adviser (Science and ESDGC), the countryside service and the grounds maintenance service; and
- 2 increase the biodiversity of their grounds.

In order to assess the potential for such a post, the Countryside Service is currently running a pilot study in five schools with varying constraints/opportunities in terms of grounds area and service budget. Although the pilot has not been completed the results so far indicate that regardless of the available 'grounds' area, there are numerous ways that biodiversity can be increased within the school sites.

Following the successful conclusion of the pilot study, the proposal, as agreed with CCW, would be for the Biodiversity in Schools officer to roll the scheme out to all interested school in Years 2, 3 & 4 (2009-2012). CCW would provide 50% of the funding for the post with the remaining 50% provided by Newport City Council by education. A possible source for raising this match funding would be a slight increase in cost of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between individual schools and Grounds Maintenance.

1.0 Background Information

- 1.1 Assisting with the delivery of environmental education by other service areas has been on an ad hoc basis. This is both for installation of features within school

- grounds and group activities at NCC sites such as nature reserves. Service areas such as Grounds and Countryside have a broad remit for environmental education; however this is not part of a formal SLA with Education. At a time when schools really need assistance with developing the potential of their grounds there is not a post committed to helping them achieve this.
- 1.2 In 2007/08 the Countryside Service successfully obtained a 4 year Framework Grant from the Countryside Council for Wales. Included within Year 1 of this grant was a proposal to undertake a pilot study to formalise an approach to improving school grounds for biodiversity, which is also a key element of the 'Eco Schools' Green Flag initiative.
 - 1.3 The pilot was to work with 4 -5 schools to determine the potential for increasing biodiversity in their school grounds, regardless of their size or condition. The pilot is run by one of the biodiversity officers as a part time programme (1½ days per week). The choice of pilot schools was assisted by the Curriculum Improvement Adviser (Science and ESDGC). The pilot schools are:
 - St.Julians High School;
 - Llanmartin Primary
 - Millbrook Primary
 - St Patrick's RC Primary
 - St Woolos Primary
 - 1.4 Each pilot area was assessed for its existing biodiversity and opportunities and challenges for the enhancement of biodiversity in each location were explored. The officer liaised with teachers, parents and children within the pilot schools to identify opportunities and constraints and create a realistic list of potential works. Following this some of the more challenging work was undertaken by contractor – removal of bitumen macadam surfacing etc in the Autumn Term. Other tasks were undertaken by pupils and parents where appropriate to their skills i.e. planting whips.
 - 1.5 Grant this year has also covered costs of implementation of raised beds, bird boxes and feeders, aromatic planting, log circles, flower plug planting, whip planting.
 - 1.6 As part of the pilot the officer has undertaken researches on schemes that have been undertaken in other authorities i.e. Learning through Landscapes and similar initiatives.
 - 1.7 The cost of the pilot has being funded 50% through Countryside Service (biodiversity) budget and 50% by Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) as part of Year 1. Total cost this year has been £6,000 of CCW funding matched with the same in officer time from countryside.

2.0 Biodiversity in Schools Officer CoreRole ~ Years 2, 3 and 4

What will they provide.....?

- 2.1 The creation of a this post will provide a single point of contact for schools to enable them to:
 - assist schools in the in the delivery of the environmental aspects of the curriculum, in conjunction with the work of the Curriculum Improvement Adviser (Science and ESDGC), the countryside service and the grounds maintenance service; and
 - increase the biodiversity of school grounds.
- 2.2 The post will be a 3 year fixed term contract starting in March 2009. The post will be at a scale 5/6 level and would be aimed at those with an environmental education background in either teaching or ecology/countryside.
- 2.3 CCW has agreed to provide up to £14,000.00 (50% of £28,000 anticipated costs). The 28k total would include the salary plus on costs and also a nominal sum to undertake some smaller practical works.
- 2.4 The post would have a direct link with CCW and other funding bodies to assist schools in funding applications and long term programming in addition to taking advantage of gifting – offers of trees, plants, materials etc from council programmes (carbon offset tree planting scheme), private individuals and organisations.
- 2.5 The post would provide the support and knowledge to develop the grounds, assist with practical works and offer on going advice and support.
- 2.6 The officer would be located within the Grounds Maintenance Service Area, which would enable the officer to liaise directly with grounds maintenance operations to ensure ongoing sustainability of each of the schemes. They would undertake in house training with grounds maintenance operatives to ensure that the managers and operatives understand the specific needs of each scheme and how this will be a new approach to the maintenance of each site.
- 2.7 Over the remaining period of the project, years 2-4, the scheme will be rolled out to other interested schools. The schools can buy in either through the Service Level Agreement with the grounds maintenance or as a stand alone agreement.
- 2.8 The cost of the match funding £14,000 for the scheme would be through a slight increase in grounds SLA, or in case of the opted-out schools an annual payment. The individual costs would be in the order of £200 - £300 per school depending on the numbers of schools wishing to be part of the programme.
- 2.9 The ongoing work of the officer will involve partnership working between Curriculum Improvement Adviser (Science and ESDGC), Education, Grounds and Countryside services and external monitoring and funding agencies such as CCW.

3.0 Added Value

- 3.1 The scheme will build on past CCW funded projects which provided nature areas for approximately 20 of Newport's 61 schools.
- 3.2 The project will fit alongside the existing Eco Schools programme, which includes biodiversity as one of its nine areas. It will also help schools to implement their Forest Schools initiatives. Whilst aiming to help schools to address their curriculum requirements, this project will also improve the overall biodiversity of schools groups, with particular emphasis on Newport's LBAP targets and teaching the children of the participating schools/organisations about practical biodiversity implementation.
- 3.3 The project will also tie in with the Newport in Bloom competition, encouraging participation and providing school grounds with increased biodiversity potential. Students and parents / guardians, as well as the wider community, will be asked to participate in implementing the identified biodiversity improvements, thus widening the sphere of influence of the project. The proposed officer will also have a key role in the development and implementation of **Eco week**, the Launch of the Newport In Bloom Campaign that reaches all schools and nursery groups in Newport.

4.0 Summary of Key Issues

- 4.1 The pilot study has been successful and NCC is proposing to take up the CCW grant offer to fund a Biodiversity in Schools officer from March 2009.
- 4.2 All remaining 60 schools in the Authority will be involved in the scheme over the 3 year project period.
- 4.3 The post will support and assist schools with the delivery of environmental aspects of the curriculum.
- 4.4 The work on the ground will increase biodiversity over Newport and help NCC achieve biodiversity targets.
- 4.5 The outcome of the scheme will be to effect a change in the approach to management school grounds. Ideally this will be to change the 'drill yard' into school gardens and the 'green desert' into species rich landscape.
- 4.4 The match funding from education will be £14,000. The cost to schools within the scheme will be between £200 and £300 per annum depending on the uptake of the scheme.