

**Government Office for the North East
Sustainable Schools Regional Networking Meeting
19 July 2007**

Minutes

In attendance:

Carol Ashworth	Government Office for the North East
David Wilson	Northumberland County Council
Neville Gaukroger	Northumberland County Council
Mike Tones	Durham County Council
Dean Jackson	North Tyneside Council
Alan Hindsman	North Tyneside Council
Paul Wellwood	South Tyneside Council
Paul Gault	Gateshead Council
Terry Sutcliffe	Middlesbrough Council
Anthony Kirkbride	Middlesbrough Council

Apologies:

Dave Smith	Government Office for the North East
Eileen Wilkinson	Redcar & Cleveland Council
John Collings	Hartlepool Council
Rich Hurst	Durham County Council

1. Welcome and Introductions

CA welcomed the group to the Government Office and thanked them for attending, setting out the aims and objectives for the meeting.

2. National Picture:

a) MT gave some national highlights from his Sustainable Schools (SS) consultancy work alongside Janice Lawson of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF, formerly, DfES). He spoke about the challenges of the Sustainable Schools and the Sustainable Development (SD) agendas, namely the dearth of skills available across the piece to support understanding of the benefits of Sustainable Development (SD) to the schools improvement and raising attainment agendas.

b) MT cited how working on SD across local authorities and regional partnerships could help stimulate growth across the following areas:

- The personal dimension;
- The economic development agenda, and
- The regeneration agenda.

And we discussed what we mean when we talk about SD.

c) **MT** discussed with the group the infrastructure that might help support regional work around SD. The group considered the operational challenges that exist in the field, and we discussed how the SD agenda supports the Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes, and the learning agenda.

3. Regional and Cross-Regional Picture:

NB: The **Pan Northern Sustainable Schools Conference**, which GO-NE, GO-Y& H and GO-NE are currently organising, will take place on 7 and 8 February 2008. Local Authorities will receive invitations during the new academic year. The event, spread over two days, is aimed at Directors of Children's Services, local authority contacts, LA members, as well as Heads.

There is a possibility that a contribution will be necessary towards this conference's costs - using a small part of the £25k networking funding, which DCSF has allocated to each Government Office for Regional Sustainable Schools networking (See Agenda item 4).

There was a general discussion about the issues facing officers across local authorities, e.g. in deciding the best way forward with the fabric of Sustainable Schools when considering such things as what are the best sustainable energy sources. There appeared to be no forum to support LAs in their sustainable decision-making, linking in to all the current pressing BSF work.

Action Point: To be aware – as a result of the Action Point CA had to speak to the Environmental and Rural Group in Government Office, we have learned that there is a network of 'Sustainable Development Officers' in each local authority. Some officers may have environmental and rural responsibilities; others may still have "LA21" as part of their job title. These officers are available to offer advice to BSF colleagues on the best way forward with BSF sustainability type decisions.

Best Practice guidance has been published, and should be available to all through these officers. Data Protection rules prevent copying the officers' names and network contact details within these minutes, and if you need further assistance to locate your LA SD counterpart, please contact CA on 0191 202 3776.

6. Future Support to Local Authorities – Group Discussion

a) We discussed how we could continue to support LAs, and **CA** agreed to have a conversation with colleagues in the regional Environment and Rural Team at Government Office. **Action Point:** **CA** found out that there exists a **Regional Sustainable Development Framework**, formerly the Integrated Regional Framework (IRF – 1994), which is about to be re-invigorated by partners across the regional agencies. This should offer more support to all those working on the SD agenda in due course.

Watch this space for further developments as they emerge:

<http://www.northeastassembly.gov.uk/voice/view.cfm?vc=15>

b) There is also a **Regional Climate Change Task Group**, and a Regional Climate Change Co-ordinator is about to be appointed. The government has given Regional Development Agencies, including One North East, increased responsibilities around Climate Change, so we should expect further developments in this area. We also expect that mandatory Climate Change indicators will be the next step for Local Area Agreements (LAAs), in due course, and **Sustainability Appraisals** are a useful tool in supporting LAs. For more information, see

<http://communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1164579>

c) Additional support can be found at the Envirowise website: <http://www.envirowise.gov.uk/> There is also an opportunity to ask questions of experts throughout the Envirowise network by e-mailing the site.

d) **Regional Support Structures:** We discussed how we might best refine regional structures to support sustainable learning. **MT** defined how this group could help support regional development, sitting underneath the NESPSS regional partnership as a sub-regional group.

We discussed how the SS agenda might be made more accessible to Heads and School Improvement Plans; how they might be persuaded to see the full benefits of SD as a tool for school improvement, and cited the good work already going on in schools in Newcastle and Durham, as examples, of work around school improvement. There were obvious concerns about 'initiative overload'. **MT** explained how **NESPSS Training Packages** could support the learning of staff school, particularly Heads. **MT** explained how Ofsted would be looking at Sustainable Schools and partnership working as measures in the future, and this would help to expand understanding of SD.

e) The group considered what success might look like, and envisaged how we could enhance regional economic as well as social development, by working with companies to promote links to schools, back to employment, and to promotion of regionally sourced SD products, e.g. solar panels. We discussed how we might harness interest and understanding, and how to best capitalise on the resources and good practice that is already out there in schools. **Funding Challenges:** We discussed how hard it was to find out about funding that might help support more sustainable development, and agreed that having a helping hand through the funding maze would be helpful for practitioners.

f) We discussed how the SS agenda could be broken down for schools, to be more manageable, via DCSF's **8 Doorways**, as long as we held the 'bigger picture' always in mind.

g) We considered how officers might get more involved with their area's **Local Area Agreements**, which are likely to contain more references to climate change and sustainable development, in the future.

4. Funding Options Paper - Group Discussion

The group discussed the options for using the £25k Regional SS Development Fund, and agreed that our recommendations should be passed to the NESPSS Board, to enable them to reach final decisions on how to spend the allocation.

- £1,000 was allocated earlier to the Newcastle Schools Eco Schools Event, which was held on 5 July 2007.
- A small allocation might need to be put aside as a contribution to the Pan Northern Sustainable Schools Event in February 2008. This remains unconfirmed.
- The group agreed that it was vital to maintain a regional co-ordination perspective, and offered £10k as a contribution to Rich Hurst's costs. **MT** explained how Rich provides a valuable regional SS and SD support.
- It was agreed that the remainder of the allocation should be used to fund a research project – **Action Point: MT** to work up the specification and copy it to all interested parties and delegates, prior to its submission to the NESPSS Board, for full agreement.

5. Future Meetings - Group Discussion

Those attending agreed that this had been a very useful forum, and would welcome the opportunity to meet again as a sub-forum of NESPSS.

6. Terms of Reference and Potential Membership of this Group

The group was keen to see regional networking take place - with One North East and Sustaine, as an example. **Action Point: CA** agreed to take forward this work in conjunction with Dave Smith, and agreed to let the group have an update on progress, and arrange a further meeting date post-September.